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THE THEATER

Stark Young



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THE THEATER

BY
STARK YOUNG



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THE THEATER
— B —
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TO
EDWARD SHELDON

GENERAL INTRODUCTION

Of all human ambitions an open mind eagerly expectant of new discoveries and ready to remold convictions in the light of added knowledge and dispelled ignorances and misapprehensions, is the noblest, the rarest and the most difficult to achieve.

JAMES HARVEY ROBINSON, in
“*The Humanizing of Knowledge.*”

It is the purpose of DORAN'S MODERN READERS' BOOKSHELF to bring together in brief, stimulating form a group of books that will be fresh appraisals of many things that interest modern men and women. Much of History, Literature, Biography and Science is of intense fascination for readers to-day and is lost to them by reason of being surrounded by a forbidding and meticulous scholarship.

These books are designed to be simple, short, authoritative, and such as would arouse the interest of intelligent readers. As nearly as possible they will be intended, in Professor Robin-

GENERAL INTRODUCTION

son's words quoted above, "to remold convictions in the light of added knowledge."

This "adding of knowledge" and a widespread eagerness for it are two of the chief characteristics of our time. Never before, probably, has there been so great a desire to know, or so many exciting discoveries of truth of one sort or another. Knowledge and the quest for it has now about it the glamour of an adventure. To the quickening of this spirit in our day DORAN'S MODERN READERS' BOOKSHELF hopes to contribute.

In addition to the volumes announced here others are in preparation for early publication. The Editors will welcome suggestions for the BOOKSHELF and will be glad to consider any manuscripts suitable for inclusion.

THE EDITORS,

For permission to reprint certain passages in this book thanks are due to the editors of the *Yale Review*, *The New Republic*, *Theatre Arts Monthly Magazine*, *The Bookman*.

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THE THEATER

The Theater Art

THE golden day in the theater would dawn when the dramatist himself directed his play, with actors capable of expressing entirely the meaning that he intends and a designer whose settings and costumes bring the whole event to its final perfection.

This blest occasion would exhibit the creator in the art of the theater working straight, using one medium directly, as any other artist does, as the painter does, the architect, the musician. But such a day never dawns; and the process by which a piece of theater art comes into existence is nothing so single or direct. We have first the idea or the matter that is to be expressed in this particular medium that we call the art of the theater. This medium in turn consists of a number of other mediums that compose it, such as the play, the acting, the décor. And these mediums involve other artists, the actor, the director, the designer, the

musician, and depend on them. The art of the theater is the most complex of all arts.

The dramatist is the most important figure in the eternal theater, the theater that outlasts one generation only, that goes on from epoch to epoch. Actors may build up styles, leave behind them traditions and theories of acting; designers of settings and costumes may illuminate their province, leave drawings after them, and even, as in the case of the Bibiena family, stamp for generations the mark of their style on the theatrical scene. But acting is transitory, a lively record while it lasts, lustrous, fading, blotted out by a few stretches of the trampling years; and the designer's art lives only or for the most part by its shadow or idea. Only the play can, as it stands, endure, according to its merit or fortune, and two centuries afterward be seen in its own body. The dramatist, too, nearly always supplies the essential idea behind a theater work. He gives the theme; and creates the theme in terms of life. Of all the parts of a work in the art of the theater his affords the closest and most securely grounded application to life. It is therefore

only natural that ninety-nine out of a hundred books on the theater have been really about the drama; and that most of the study of the subject, outside of the profession, has been concerned with plays.

But in the immediate occasion—an evening at a theater—the dramatist's share takes its place with the other elements that go to make up the art. Along with the acting, the décor and the directing, goes the drama itself—all make up what is not dramatic literature, not acting, not designing or directing but one art: the art of the theater. The question as to which of these elements or parts that contribute to this theater art contributes most, is for the moment unimportant; we may say that each goes to make a living whole, exactly as we may say that the parts of a man's body are all seen alive together, all make up the body, which consists of and lives by them all.

Life, the energy, the living essence—Pirandello's *Stream of Life*, Bergson's *Vital Urge*—goes on, finding itself bodies or forms to contain and express it. Behind whatever is dramatic lies the movement of the soul outward toward

forms of action, the movement from perception toward patterns of desire, and the passionate struggle to and from the deed or the event in which it can manifest its nature. Behind any work of art is this living idea, this soul that moves toward its right body, this content that must achieve the form that will be inseparable from it. A perfect example in any art arrives not through standards but when the essential or informing idea has been completely expressed in terms of this art, and comes into existence entirely through the medium of it. This is perfection, though we may speak of a perfection large or small. When a form is found that will completely express an idea that is largely applicable to human experience and therefore largely significant, we have a large perfection; and a high perfection when the work of art is what Longinus would call an echo of elevation of mind—*μεγαλοφροσύνη*—and in its presence the mind “in the height of its rapture exults and feels a sort of command, as if it itself produced what it has only been perceiving.”

Play, acting, design, directing, music make up the theater art. But so little is that recog-

nized or remembered that, though we speak of the play or the acting or some such element in what we have been to see, we have no name for the whole instance. Our sense of the theatrical event as a whole must suffer for this lack of a word. In this discussion, in order to avoid such a poor phrase as an "instance of creation in the art of the theater" we shall say "a theater work" as we say a painting, a symphony, a drama, a poem.

With us in America just now the theater is at a certain sag. Where five years ago there was excitement over new impulses and explorations into fresh forms, there is in this present lull only what is at best a kind of marking time. Then there was a great asking How? how? how? how shall this be? but now there is little. So that now while we have leisure to let our eyes wander over it, may be a good time for a little book of notes on the theater art as a whole. We may consider the various arts or elements that make it up and the sensuous avenues that lead to it.

But first there is the matter of seeing the theater as an art at all.

An Impure Art

TO see anything as art means that you do not see it as a duplicate of something in life. It means that you see it as complete in itself. You judge its truth by its intentions, its essential idea. It means that you allow it to be free of its material, and perceive that it uses the material—as Corot does a landscape, El Greco a human body, Beethoven a state of mind or mood—to express an idea, a soul; that it does what it chooses to do, forcing the material to its own purpose, which is to find a form for a content.

What makes the theater so difficult to see as an art is the impurity of its medium.

For purity, music and architecture come first among the arts. They profit most from the advantage that is enjoyed by an art in which resemblance plays no part and the medium can express pure idea or quality. They are obviously the most ideal of the arts. The musician through tone, tempo, pitch and rhythm

establishes designs or bodies or patterns that are the essence and the soul of the experience that he wishes to create. The architect employs line and mass to create a form that is free of every likeness and is judged by nothing outside of architecture. Painting is in general less free. Certain modern painting has essayed pure color forms free of all likeness and expressive in themselves. But painting fundamentally touches on likeness; it derives from our definite visual experience, and follows the world around us, in which we see forms not as abstractions but as stubborn facts embodied in reality. Where a musician can give us despair and loneliness itself, a general and essential experience, a painter can give us the experience only by means of a definite phenomenon, an instance out of life through whose representation a lonely despair may be aroused in us. The poet is free only after a fashion; he takes his subjects from life, so much of which consists of external facts, and to these facts he must to some extent at least be faithful. He is, furthermore, less free than the musician or the architect owing to the fact that his medium—words

—is bound faster to actual associations, to connotations, than theirs, though they too, of course, must contend with something of the same thing in familiar and remembered forms and motives. But any one of these arts is pure compared to the theater.

What pigment is to a painting and sound to music, the acting or the décor is to the art of the theater. But the designer is an artist working through his own medium of the décor. His service to the theater depends on his being himself an artist in his own art. And the actor complicates matters by being an artist himself, using a distinct and additional medium—his personality, body and voice—to create his idea. He gives himself to the whole creation but he remains himself as well, or he would not be an artist and therefore not a fit medium for the whole idea. There is a further complication. The actor and the acting constitute the medium by which the characters and their actions are converted into the art of the theater. The actor is a medium, as oil pigment is Corot's medium; the material is the personage that is portrayed, as the valley of water and trees

and light is Corot's material. The acting is a medium, the human action and character portrayed is the material. But the actor conveying a man to us is himself a man. John Barrymore acting Hamlet is a man as Hamlet is. What the character does is a piece of human behavior, and what the actor does is behavior. Art and nature, which is which? Where does one leave off and the other begin? Which is the material, which the medium? To make the distinction is not easy. Only in the theater does so much intervene between the artist's idea and his expression of it.

To know that every work of art is complete in itself and free of its material is the beginning of any understanding of art. About music and architecture every one feels this freedom by mere instinct and by experience with what these arts have offered him. Nobody thinks Beethoven's "Ninth Symphony" good because some of it sounds like a cuckoo, nobody would object to Bach's "Coffee Cantata" because you hear no grinding, roasting, and boiling. Only a simpleton would praise a building because it looked like a tree or a hat; and an idiot say that

he wanted Bernini's façade of St. Peter's built to look more like nature. Even in painting there are thousands who allow Botticelli to distort the anatomy of his Venus, raising the hips and lifting the body on to the balls of the feet, tilting the head to one side, in order to secure the idea that he wishes to create in terms of design—a certain vision and an intellectual poetry that we know as his—and for the same end we will allow him to flatten, to blanch into pallor, his leaves and trunks and to outline with gold these unrealities in the form of trees.

Of trees, indeed, the painter may take what elements he chooses. He may render them faithfully, in a sort of noonday prose like Rousseau; or as a flat pattern in a mural composition like Giotto; he may turn them as Gainsborough does into textures like those of tapestry; he may follow Corot and make of trees only a home for dew and morning; or like some old Chinese painter he may set down the trees in a line whose quality expresses serenity or solitude or whatever idea the painter wishes. In every case you judge the painting by the tree only in so far as the painter's intention was

resemblance or duplication of the tree. Only to judge the degree of success in the likeness, where likeness was intended, may you look from the work of art to the model or material.

We can at least try to avoid theories and conceptions that will cut us off from what a theater work has to say and that set up obstacles to our response and enjoyment. If you say that Mansfield was bad in *Peer Gynt* because as the peasant youth he did not move and act like a peasant, you do one of two things—you either, because of some objection on artistic principle, hold yourself back from what you like, which is a limitation in your theory; or you find an argument for not liking what you fail to see or understand, which is only plausible obtuseness.

The wise thing to do at such a moment is to remind yourself that all arts rest on essentially the same basis, that what makes sense about one makes sense about another, so far as fundamentals go. In your Mansfield impasse, then, ask yourself if your objection, namely that the artist did not contrive a likeness, would hold in other arts. In painting, for instance, is

Veronese's "Marriage at Cana" bad because these Jews of the first century are dressed as Venetians of the sixteenth? Or is the sculpture of the Egyptians inferior because it is not anatomical? The answer is that in each case, the painter, actor, and sculptor, according to his genius and his special art, made what use he chose, and at his own peril, of his material.

The history of any art is a history of man's states of mind and spirit, not of the objective world around him. To be ignorant of that is to be ignorant of the theater as an art, and leads to a mere muddle of resemblances and recognitions, a confusion between life and the theater, contradictions about naturalness and artifice, and blindness to such ideas as require a new method or form to express them.

Avenues

THE art of the theater has several voices no one of which is necessarily more important than the rest. One is the word, the spoken symbol of an idea. One lies in the realm of music, the avenue of the ear, and uses tone, rhythm, tempo to express what is to be conveyed to the audience. The third is the visual, what we see there on the stage, what speaks to our eyes and through them conveys to us an idea.

The importance or expressiveness of each of these languages, the word, the music, the visual, will vary according to what is to be expressed, since one quality or idea is best expressed in words, another in gesture or color, another in sound; not every kind of pleasure—as Aristotle said of tragedy—can be required of any one of these, but only its own proper pleasure. The importance of each of these will vary, too, according to the man who receives it; for one man

the word above all else is what can rouse the life by which a work of art is alive for him; for another the ear is the liveliest approach; for a third the eye brings most excitement and response. That is as it may be—every man in his own humor and born talents. But one thing we must keep clear. Nobody must make the common and natural mistake of thinking that in the theater it is the word above all else that talks.

As for the average man and his senses, he can be shown how little he hears, if you take the unfruitful pains of showing him up. You could soon prove to him that at the most only a tenth of what a musician hears in a symphony of Beethoven's will register in his ear. The tiny beetle for delicate sounds heard from afar makes him a sorry figure; and the image of an Indian hearing a distant message by leaning down above a flowing stream, proves to him what he has lost in the keenness of this sense. As for his eyes you can demonstrate that he does not know that shadows are bluer at one hour than another and that what he calls gray is a strong violet. He confuses rose with red;

he will not have seen it when Lombardi lengthens his panel to make the elevation of his choir wall soar above the reredos. When we come to words demonstration is harder. Words are in a more private and inner region and are only symbols of the images and actions of our brains. Words are a sort of secret science for him, like the plumber and his operations in the dark or the doctor's veiled knowledges. And so, since it is harder to confront him with what he gets from words, your man may conclude that words mean what they mean; in the kingdom of words, he thinks, men are all born equal. But even there he has no ground to stand on. Even if his wits and his culture could retain all word meanings in their exact propriety, provided they had any, he would find that meanings themselves will not stay in place, not even the names of the plainest objects. Grass, which means a certain form of vegetation no doubt, means also to one a happy verdure and to another the frailty of life; and there are those to whom coal, plain useful carbon in the furnace room, means mere blackness or heat and those to whom it spells the cost of

living. And there are numberless words, words like *beauty, endeavor, ardent, inclination*, that have numberless degrees of meaning to as many users; to these many minds they are, as Tiresias said of Bacchus' meaning, not violations but fulfillments, and are expressive of each follower according to his nature.

But whether an average spectator responds most readily to words, sound or sight or whether one art is more expressive than another, is not the point, which is that each one of these is an avenue and each art a language in itself, and that every art is justified in its existence by the extent to which it alone can express what no other art can. On the same basis we can say that in the theater a gesture added to a word is justified finally in so far as it expresses something that the word cannot express; or that in a cry of joy the tone or pitch says one thing, a word in the midst of it clinches or defines the nature of the joyous emotion, and both together bring us more fully into play. The quality of an action may be intensified, or varied at least, by putting it in the midst of a different setting. The figures of

men fighting before a gray wall, or against red curtains or in a black empty space, what a different thing is said in each case!

The function of words we all know. They express nothing except by agreement. No words except the onomatopoetic, only the *thuds*, *buzzes*, *booms* and so on of the dictionary, which merely reproduce the thing they talk about, are anything but symbols that, by usage or consent, stand for ideas and things. But the word specifies, focuses, directs. In the midst of tears the word *grief*, or *homesickness*, gives a more definite point to the underlying thing the tears express, in the same way that a title on a musical composition—*Reverie*, for example, *In the Elysian Fields*, *The Garden in the Rain*—directs the whole experience that the music expresses to a special application, and so gives us a starting point that is more concrete and that may gratify a certain side of us.

Words, too, by the memories they arouse, the things they connote, achieve infinite, inexpressible meanings for us. And words in combination, by this living surprise of their use at an artist's hands, enjoy the resources not only

of what they reflect upon each other when set together thus, but also of the accompanying rhythm and tone, with all the vitality that this implies. The purpose of every work of art is to arouse in us the experience that the artist had and strives to re-create; the purpose in every use of a word is to arouse the life in it, to recapture its freshness and that first glory that it had when a living need created it. And lastly there remains the power of certain words as mere sounds, without onomatopoetic qualities and without necessary associations with what they represent, though often that, too, swiftly follows after: *desiderium*, *sidera*, *θάλασσα*, *prière*, *flores*, or, *rain*, or *colonnade*, the very sound itself of these moves into the sense and takes us.

But the word itself, made up of letters as it is, cannot in the theater of all places be divorced from its sound. The harmony of speech, recitation, voice, brings the word-medium of the theater into the realms of music. There is too, and quite divorced from vocal tone, the time interval in speech. The distance at which our ear receives a word from one person that

answers some word of another's a moment before, is as much a part of the idea as the word itself. The tempo and the tone are languages quite as the word is, sometimes one of the three is more important to the idea, sometimes another. The plain word *no* means simply negation or refusal, but by tempo and vocal tone other meanings are added. When a character asks, Are you certain of his guilt? and another answers *no*, he is speaking two languages, one the language of the word, which in this case remains the same; the other of music, by which the meaning can be changed at will. If he says *no* at once in a clear tone, *no* fifty seconds after the question and in a shrill tone, *no* one minute after the question in an angry tone, and so on, he is plainly saying different things, things of which the word is only a small part. The gradations and values of sound in the theater are in their way as infinite and inexhaustible as music is.

In a cultivated theater the region of the ear, of music, is by contrast with that of the eye, of the visual, a livelier means of expression. Not for nothing does the word *æsthetic* go back,

through the idea of perception, to the Greek word *to hear*. It involves all the qualities of speech, tone, tempo, rhythm, accent and emphasis, and also the use of music itself wherever the theater artist finds that his idea can at a certain point be best expressed through music. Where the painter can give us only a panorama like a body of soldiers marching, and the poet only words about it, set, if you like, in a certain expressive rhythm, the musician can put marching into us, can lift up the soles of our feet. But this is obvious and a commonplace about the art. Music, too of all arts draws most deeply on the stored-up experience in us that belongs to the race, an ageless biological memory, only at the surface pricked and ticketed by our individual life. Things for which there are no words, which rule us without sharing their counsels with us, which have no outlines or patterns in our thinking but which move in us like the wind through the world, which are ourselves indeed and carry us beyond ourselves, all these can sound, express or arouse. Music is the art most ready to

live within us. Music alone of all the arts can express at the same time both the life of our senses and the life of our desires.

Of the visual side of the theater the element that is nearest to sound or music lies in the acting and in that side of the acting that we might indeed call its visual music. By this I mean the flow of movement and gesture, of stage position, of the ensemble and the single figure, of the continuity of rhythm that the actor's body establishes. This I mean at the moment to be considered as separate from action or gesture that imitates the actions we might see the characters do in life, though that too has its visual music. I mean movement as in itself expressive, expressive as the movement in an architectural façade is, or as the sea's lines are expressive. Familiar gestures on the stage may be expressive through the meanings that we have learned to attach to them in life. But a gesture may in itself move and persuade us, quite apart from any resemblance and quite without being what is called natural at all. It may have about its line, its rhythm, its cadence

and completed design, something that draws us along with it and persuades us to its idea as a passage in music does.

Acting in general of every kind—in addition to this visual music of movement—establishes what is after all the most convincing element in the theater. It speaks to our eyes by showing them the people and the actions that we see in life. Words may convey the characters' thoughts and may be in themselves a kind of action; music may arouse the liveliest and most deeply essential response; settings and atmosphere may stir, heighten or transport us. But the persons that we see, what we see them do, and the events they share in, these are what give the theater its hold and its reality; these are the starting point for our response, however far great words, music and scene may illuminate and go beyond them. Even in an extreme instance of the drama of inaction, Chekhov's *Cherry Orchard*, for example, what counts is the picture of the characters and the action they do not do; and to this picture the words spoken are only a murmur of life beneath the living image.

The importance of the décor, of the set-

tings and costumes that are involved, will, naturally, vary in importance with the occasion. One play depends heavily on the dramatic rightness of the setting, on a certain dramatic harmony or contrast in its scene, another will be independent of the setting; one theatrical idea will be expressed more by setting and atmosphere than by words or acting, another can no more be expressed by the visual scene than a tariff law could be said in music or a proverb in architecture. By way of décor, however, is brought to the theater no small portion of the resources of painting, sculpture and architecture, and the power of each to express what it alone of all arts can. And through the settings and costumes the theater affords the gamut of textures, involves our sense of touch, and all the experience connected with that sense.

There are forms of theatrical art, celebrations, ballets or revues that lean heavily on spectacle; and there is a play now and then that depends for its point on settings and costumes that express an epoch or a locality dramatized into the play. But in general the décor is far behind both the play and the acting as an ex-

pressive medium in the theater, as is proved by the fact that, though good acting often saves a bad play from failure and a good play is sometimes actor-proof, settings and costumes alone have rarely carried poor acting and poor drama to success.

All these sensuous resources, then, are avenues by which the theater draws us out and enters into us. All these various arts, each a medium in itself, contribute to the theater medium's inclusiveness and range.

Translations

WHY is it that when a producer like the late Beerbohm Tree is at endless pains and expense to give us a section of Henry VIII's palace as it looked, exactly reproduced, and puts within it figures with costumes of the utmost accuracy, we feel so little call to admire? It is all an excellent duplication, it is all what the real Henry lived amidst. But it hardly strikes us as art at all.

This is because architecture that is a copy in paint and canvas of an original in stone, remains after all a copy, a photograph of architecture. It can be admired as such. But it is only that, and remains only that until it is expressed in terms of this new art, the theater, of which it has become an element.

Architecture, painting, costume, music, literature, all these arts enter into that of the theater; architecture and painting and costume as a part of the décor, literature as the spoken drama; music either as expressive in itself, giving us the

dramatic experience where nothing else might serve so well, or as a means of release, of breaking down the entity, the bounds of control, within which we try to hold ourselves, and drawing us into the infectious life of the moment.

But none of these arts can exist alone to itself in the theater. Either it becomes theatrical or it remains extraneous, the mere injection of another substance into the body of this art, without making it a living part of that body, as flesh introduced into our stomachs is made into our flesh before it is a part of us. An architectural façade before it becomes theater has to be restated in theatrical terms, which include the play's dramatic mood, the space element in the theater—that special *optique du théâtre* of which we read—the presence of the actors, the stage lighting, the time elements and so on. A costume taken from a Holbein portrait of King Henry must be restated in theater terms before it becomes a part of this art of the theater, precisely as Holbein had to restate the original clothes in painting terms.

Exactly the same thing is true of literature.

A word, a sentence, spoken in the theater has from that moment been re-created in new terms and must stand a new test. It is no longer a word on a page but is translated now into another medium, the theater, where it may pass from poor literature to at least better theater or shrink from good literature to very poor theater. At all events it is theater now; the sound of the actor's voice is added to it and the time values that he creates, the audience is added, the stage spaces and the positions of the persons on it with regard to each other, the lights, the scene itself. It is obvious that the word *exquisite* differs when spoken before a thousand people from what it is in a book; and that if four people standing in a line say *The honor of the family is lost*, the thing said is not what the sentence repeated on a printed page would say. All writing must be created anew and something thereby added that was not there before, a new body with a new soul, before it passes from literature into the theater art.

What is true of these arts passing into theater is in the same way true of the material out of life that must suffer this translation into

new terms. Material does not become art until it is restated thus; which is what Congreve meant when he said that if a poet should steal a dialogue of any length from the extempore discourse of the two wittiest men upon earth, he would find the scene but coldly received by the town.

Art, indeed, can be thought of as a restatement of an experience in one part of life in terms of another part of life. Byron, riding for hours in the pine wood that joins Ravenna to the Adriatic shore, might take into himself the quiet there, the immemorial spaces of the sea beyond the tree trunks, the light so still and serene under the trees, and put it into his poem, not the descriptive record of it only, the poetic picture, but the essential quality, which would be evinced in the peculiar music of his verses, their tone and mood. Gluck might take what the moon at night in its clear sky aroused in him and restate it in music, another section of life. In conduct, the moral life, it could be the same. A man contemplating a vile, base action might, after having life given to him by a noble music or some grave beauty in a building of

Vignola's, find himself unwilling to do the act; what he lived in Vignola he wishes to live in his actions.

On the other hand a man after reading Byron's poem might experience in the pine wood at Ravenna a fuller response, discovering in his moment there a deeper quality of perfection in living. This reverses the matter and completes the point. Life, rising in us, discovers forms for its soul, in acts, in ideas, in art. The life expressed in one of these parts of life can find also forms for itself in other parts.

A work of art is either alive or dead. It is alive when the life in it to be expressed has found a body in the art involved, a body composed of its elements. Otherwise, whatever the idea, the result as a work of art does not exist. A picture of a young visionary lying dead from the poison his despair has brought him to, may be pathetic because of the story we get from it, and may give us a species of literary excitement but only that. The essential idea has not found its expression in painting terms, in qualities of color, line, brush and so on.

Blood smeared on the door of a church might arouse us to a terrific response, but none of us would say that it had any architectural existence. The shock of it was anatomical, not architectural. In the theater the same.

In the reverse direction if we see a work of art and do not feel the life in it passing into us, restated in terms of our natures or ideas or acts, we can hardly be said to have seen it at all; we have not responded to it. We have missed its content, which is there to be received; for the life in it is not strange to the life in us. St. Paul's saying that we live in one flesh—*ἐν τῷ σῶμα*—is not alone true of human beings but of men and the arts as well, they are parts of one another's bodies.

A man's body is alive throughout only in so far as it translates into its own kind whatever is taken into it; what is not translated is not a part of it. So in the theater what is alive is organic, it partakes throughout of the same tissue, the same nature; every part of it has its due tendency toward the whole.

The Drama

THE play is the most important element in the theater.

Sometimes the acting or the décor will count for more than the play, but it is the play in most cases that gives the idea on which the whole is built and that creates the dominant quality of the whole effect. It is the play that contributes the guiding mind, the essential idea which the régisseur, however great an artist he may be, tries to express through the theatrical medium that he works in. From the play the actors draw their chief notion of the characters they create. From the play as a rule the designer takes his start, however short he may come of it or how far go beyond. And it is the play that endures where scenery fades and rots, the pattern of the color and the miracle of the lighting long since forgotten.

This is especially true in our English theater. We have no solid body of tradition and nothing of what you might call a theater world, not in

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the serious theater at least; nor have we any system of revivals of the same play throughout a season or from season to season. In the theater of revues and musical comedies it is different, what is done in a certain kind of scene will be repeated in another scene of the same kind; there is a language of gesture, dance and gag that keeps going and alive quite as much as the words of the pieces do and sometimes more than the words. But in our serious theater what survives is words. A play remains as a text, and the gestures and movement that were once a part of it are lost, and in a very few seasons after a production would have to be entirely re-created.

Other theaters are different no doubt, certainly the French is. That theater has for centuries been centered in Paris. From the time of *le Roi Soleil* the Parisian theater has had volumes of unwritten matter that is as much a part of the plays produced in the theater as the words are. There are positions, tricks, tones, pieces of stage business for Molière's plays that survive from Molière's own performances. And, to take more modern ex-

amples, the Guitry plays are so much a part of Paris and Paris of them that many of their scenes could not be produced at all from the text, only from seeing what is done in them on the French stage could we present them anew. But even at that, in France as with us, it is the text that is most likely to be handed on.

A play consists, obviously, of plot, characters, dialogue. Of these the theater of modern times has centered on character as the revealing element, as that part of drama by which most is expressed. Most people at present would go so far as to say that character is the all important and first consideration in a drama; it is almost a commonplace to say so. Such a theory would be expected. It falls in with our general drift toward detail instead of finality of outline and with our general spinelessness and weak touch. It is like the color, the shading, the mood in so much modern painting, all very well in their way, but something more of pattern and robust composition added to it would be a better sign of strength. Great character creation is a fine thing, obviously; but it is just as obvious that much fiddling and

fooling and faking comes easy to character writing, and that such writing is always in danger of running into mere psychological patter and subdivision on subdivision without reality of any kind. The fictionistic trash of much modern character study a blind man ought to see.

"Character," Mr. Galsworthy goes so far as to say, "is situation," which I think is true, if you mean that a character fully created carries with it the action expressive of him at a given moment. But when Mr. Galsworthy says that character is plot, he must be wrong. A set of characters fully explored and created in quality and motive and situation, if you like, and all taken together, do not imply the plot. The combination of events that will arise involves not only these characters and their actions but their relation to the life around them and to the complete dramatic idea that the dramatist wishes to express, and uses these characters and actions and events to express.

In the greatest plays the permanent value rests, on the whole, on both plot and charac-

terization; in plays below the highest grade it rests sometimes on one, sometimes on the other, though in modern plays of this rank it is characterization on which the permanent value is based. It is true also that in many a modern play what interests us almost entirely is the characters, just as in modern buildings what may interest us is some quality or special element presented. But this does not mean that such a play might not hold its place longer or such a building not be more important architecturally if these characters roundly achieved a plot to sum up themselves and their actions, and if these special partial elements achieved a significant outline and architectural mass.

Great character creation is a fine thing in a drama, but the sum of all its characters is the story that they enact. Aristotle puts the plot at the head of the dramatic elements; of all these he thinks plot the most difficult and the most expressive. And he is right. Not that every plot stands first, or any and every plot is more important than the characters in the play; any plot counts only in so far as it is expressive. But the fact remains, nevertheless, that the plot

is the most important of all the elements in drama because of them all it can be most completely expressive of the characteristic idea behind the play. And by this process:

The artist has an idea, an essential quality, a content, to express in terms of a play. Ready at hand he has, as means of expression, the life or atmosphere or manners portrayed, the sentiments, thoughts and emotional reactions characteristic of human beings; he can work in terms of these and of his characters, their actions and the plot or story. He puts his idea into each of these terms, as the human characteristic is expressed in the various parts of a man's body. Of these terms the most important—because they express most to us—are character, action and plot. A man's character is most apparent in what he does or does not do; our character appears in our actions. The dramatist discovers creative actions, actions expressive of his characters. A plot in a play derives from these actions brought into combination, as they meet and cross one another, in the world of life that they embody and express. If the characters express themselves in their actions, and the sum of

their actions implies the plot, it follows that the plot includes, or can at least include, them both, and can be therefore of all the elements in the play the most inclusive, and therefore most largely and completely expressive of the play's essential idea or quality.

People go on telling us, nevertheless, that the plot is secondary, and they prove it, if by no other argument, by citing the supposedly well-known fact that there are only a few plots, after all, for dramatists to use. Thirty-six plots there are in all, according to the scholars, we are told. This business about few plots, or thirty-six plots, goes back almost a century and a half to Gozzi's famous category. But Gozzi said nothing of plots, he said thirty-six situations. Schiller, so Goethe tells us, thought Gozzi had allowed too small a number, but when he came to count, he could not find so many. Georges Polti in his book, *Les 36 Situations Dramatiques*, developed Gozzi's idea. But the point here is that, while the number of situations may be so limited, the plots to be woven around them are innumerable. And a plot, moreover, does not mean a mere loose

story, but a story in its exact dramatic gradations.

So common is the prejudice in favor of character as the leading element in drama that you can hear the characters spoken of as creation, the plot as invention. A foolish distinction; compared to the characters in a play the plot is only creation in larger terms, since the author starts with qualities which he creates into characters, whom, in turn, he creates into actions and these actions into a plot; so that the plot is only an extension of his creation. In a poor example plot may appear as mere invention because of its lack of connection with the characters, in which case it seems only a vehicle for them, or merely tagged on to keep things going. Or it may appear as mere invention because of its final expressiveness; the artist might seem merely to have come upon it, as men come upon the force of steam or the use of electricity. But the more inclusive and expressive the plot the more the degree of creation. In a good play the plot is the most inseparable element in it; in such a case there is no locale, character or action that would

mean the same if isolated to itself and seen without the plot. The plot is the most elusive element in a play to regard in itself because the hardest to isolate, to see separately; and at the same time it is the most distinct and the most final in its effect. The plot is the ultimate element by which we can discern the essential character of each individual play as distinguished from all other plays. This point, despite the critical theories about character and plot, will be proved at once by any history of dramatic literature. In any account of a series of plays the historian will finally distinguish one from another by a statement of their plots.

Is then the plot of *Othello* its most important element? Yes. The characters exist, they act; they have a certain relationship among themselves as embodiments of human nature and of the dramatist's ideas; the sum of their relationships and actions determines the plot. Is the plot of *Le Misanthrope* the most important element in it? No. But that only amounts to saying that Molière was not able to create a plot that would completely embody his idea, which he was obliged to express largely

through his characters, who exist in their quality rather than in what they do, and that even then his achievement has been admired more as literature than theater. Chekhov's *Three Sisters* on the other hand is theater, as experiment has proved, but the idea is most expressed through character and atmosphere, unless we say, as I should, that what the people in it do not do constitutes a kind of negative plot that counts more than anything else in our impression of the play.

What impresses me most about the work of Mr. Eugene O'Neill is his power at his best to create a plot outline that in itself has shape, idea. In this respect *The Hairy Ape* of all his plays comes first. In that play the story itself is a simple line that in itself expresses the entire idea. Hank, the Stoker, exploded from that job into the world, tries to join the I.W.W., he is kicked out of that, he goes into the great ape's cage and is crushed to death—neither man nor beast has a place for him. So completely expressive is the pattern of this plot that neither the characters nor the dialogue seem essential to the idea. It may be said, too, that Mr.

Eugene O'Neill's great gift is most evident in the bold figure of his plots. His men and women are often mere symbols or type puppets to carry out the action, and what they say is often type speech in dialogue that is obviously to serve the purposes of the story or dramatic theme. The strong stir of life that this dramatist can often arouse derives from the fact that he gives us the sense of action and of an intense current of emotion rather than of close and detailed observation or individual character likeness. A part of his reputation is due to the ease with which people can convey the idea of one of his plays by recounting the mere bare plot.

Fables, whose life is long when they are good, are all plot. In a fable like that of *The Prodigal Son* the characters are wholly action, we know nothing of them but what taken all together they did, we know nothing but the plot, and this expresses the whole idea. The history of great fables as the undying vehicles of ideas proves their consummate worth. And finally, to leave art and come to actual men and women, we can say that in the case of a man like St. Francis of Assisi it is largely his genius

for doing things wonderfully expressive of himself and his idea, that makes him to this day so real to us; and, furthermore, we may say that there is no character in history who is not most remembered by his story.

Of the four moods in drama, tragedy, comedy, farce and melodrama, the tragic must always be greater than any other because it most of all brings to bear upon the atom of our human life the infinite universe; and because it includes more of our life, which, whatever happy emphasis it may have had in its long course, is grounded in the tragic, it begins in another's pain and ends in death. All things pushed to their bounds are tragic, for despite the wills and passionate desires that we exert upon them, they have an end at last and at last are taken from us. The tragic in drama has had many definitions, the struggle of the individual will against eternal law, the struggle of the good with the good, and so on, as we may see in any primer of the subject. In older styles the image of tragedy is always death, the death of the hero is the conclusion of the struggle. It was upon the shock of death that the famous

metaphysical comfort of the philosophers ensued, the state in which we rise above ordinary considerations of personal advantage and contemplate the whole, with our passions quieted, our tempers purged, our spirits lifted with the sense of wisdom gained. In later forms the tragic can be death, as in *Ghosts*, or the closed passage in *The Three Sisters*, mere negation and defeat of life. Or it can be what it is in Pirandello's *Henry IV*, the victory of life over the man's will to permanence, the man's betrayal by that life that had made him what he was and what he willed to remain.

All these definitions and images are at bottom a description of a defeat of life, a defeat of the human inner life trying to find itself and its due form. In all tragedies we see the conflict of wills; we see elements of human life that are set against one another, both good in so far as they are alive, but one by its disproportionate amount destroying the other. In one of the greatest tragedies this failure extends even to the drama itself. A part of the universal melancholy of Shakespeare's play consists in the fact that the dramatist never

succeeded in finding a dramatic form that could completely express his idea; even as a play *Hamlet* expresses tragic defeat.

Aristotle speaks of tragedy as dealing with superior persons. We could not say that in our modern drama, but we can say that tragedy deals with elements of living that are superior because they are more intense. Comedy exhibits a less intense life but sets it against a scale of social values by which individual desire or excess may appear disproportionate and hence ridiculous. Both comedy and tragedy might be included in the gift of a great dramatic poet, as Plato in the *Symposium* says by way of his Socrates, who forces Aristophanes and Agathon to admit, much against their Greek inclinations, that a great tragic power in a poet ought to include the comic. Humor in social comedies is measured in its importance by the extent to which it becomes revealing. The lowest form of humor in comedy is the joke, the pun, the witticism stuck in for its own sake and put into the mouths of any character regardless. Of these are the wise-cracks of Broadway and the epigrams of Oscar Wilde. Next

comes the piece of humor that is comic in itself but much more so because of its comment on the character that says it. Sheridan's Sir Anthony Absolute abounds in such humor. The highest form of humor is that which finds expression in all the terms of the comedy, in the character, the action, and the place in the play's design at which it occurs. Of these Mr. George Kelly has a fine instance in his *Torch Bearers* when in a midst of a performance by a group of stage-struck amateurs in a provincial town, the young widow whose husband's death had prevented her playing the leading rôle, cannot keep from behind the scenes and when the curtain calls are taken, cannot resist but goes on, mourning veil and all, and takes a bow. This is funny itself, it shows the woman's nature and her relation to the comic theme; and, coming where it does in the play, it sums up the whole folly that is being held up for laughter. In *Tartuffe* the spot at which Orgon's mother refuses to believe ill of the hypocrite even after he has been exposed, is perfect comic detail. It reveals the old woman's inmost self; it comments on hypocrisy and what

that works in people's minds; and at this stage of the plot it shows Orgon himself what he was like at the beginning.

The technical charm of a good comedy of manners can be likened to modeling in relief, where the limits are fixed and where within a depth of an inch the values are caught and the implications achieved. In that finest scene in any English comedy of manners, that in which Congreve's Millamant consents to marry Mirabell, the dazzling quality of the writing derives from the fact that within their limits of banter and epigram Congreve has given us the sense of two noble natures, of true passion, of intense concern, without ever losing for a second his scale, his touch, his airy key; with the waving of a fan he manages to imply the winds that blow through the vast world of life.

In romantic comedy at its best that "swift perception of similarities" which we call wit takes on yet happier revelations. It becomes incandescent; the similarities extend into felicitous imagination, we have poetic comedy, wings that fly out of the window of the social drawing-room, songs that forget the limits of

a sane society. Lower down the scale comes ordinary romantic comedy, the sentimental humor with which we are familiar. The essence of all romantic comedy high and low is its freedom from that more exact measure by which social comedy gets its values. The essence of the romantic is possibility, the liberty of adorable escape.

To call a play a farce is nothing against it. Some of the best comic dramas are farces. Bernard Shaw often writes what is at bottom brilliant cerebral farce and Pirandello's theater is farce or, to be more exact, is *commedia dell' arte* in which the familiar characters are ideas, abstract and unreal as Harlequin or Columbine, with the brain as the public square where their lively actions take place. One of the traits of farce and melodrama—which parallels farce—is exaggeration, as every one knows, the heightening beyond probability or possibility that each may employ when it chooses. But this exaggeration is only a phase of what is their essential difference from comedy and tragedy, which is their freedom from the stricter conditions. Their flight is reckless,

they are the playwright's trip to the moon. Farce is free to disregard those limits within which the sweet sanity and humor of comedy appear. Melodrama is free to avoid the tragic finality, to evade its conclusion. Farce is closer than comedy is to tragedy because of its stretch beyond the bounds of a social measure and good sense. Melodrama is closer to comedy than tragedy is because it need bother with the final truth only so much as it chooses. Both farce and melodrama take the cash and let the credit go; they eat their cake and have it too. Through this they are lower forms of drama.

Alongside these dramatic forms runs the perennial drama of sentiment, plays that fall under almost any head so long as it is not disagreeably important. The abilities, as Goldsmith said, that can hammer out a novel are fully sufficient for a sentimental play. You need "only to raise the characters a little," give "the hero a riband," the heroine a title, and "mighty good hearts" to them, with a pathetic scene or two, and a new set of scenery. For these dramas we may remember the French proverb for actors—*pour les sots acteurs Dieu*

créa les sôts spectateurs—and say that for simple-minded art God made simple-minded occasions.

There is one point we recognize too little about all dramas, whether tragedy, comedy, farce or melodrama. This is the truth of structure, by which I mean the degree to which the structure of a drama is a part of its idea, as the height of a table is a part of its truth; I mean that in drama structure and tone are, as they are in music and architecture, expressive elements. In a drama there is a certain final expression that lies in the sheer order of its development, in its proportions, in the emphasis of its parts. The exact spot in *Macbeth* at which Fleance escapes, the spot at which is sprung the ironic surprise of the last of the witches' prophecies and thereafter the ensuing speed of the exposition and of the dénouement, all establish a large part of what Shakespeare desires to express. Goldoni's comedy of *La Locandiera*, usually spoken of by criticisms in English as very slight, takes its admirable depth most of all from the sequence of its parts, the order in which it progresses, the fine, sane,

sweet and witty openness of its development by which its relationships and parts are assembled like the parts in a sunlit landscape.

The superiority of Molière over all other writers of comedy consists not in any words or single character so much as in his tone. The greatness of Molière's plays lies in their tone. His tone appears not so much in anything said or done in the course of a play, and not so much in the characters created, as in the distribution of accents, the sequence of parts, and the management by which Molière makes things more or less insignificant and obvious in themselves say something significant when set together; he contrives an order and combination that will itself help to express his idea. Many a drama from the Latin mind, from the French or Italian or Spanish, is lost to us on just this basis; we cannot judge it because so much of it is expressed in its structural proportion and tone, and these are languages that we often fail to understand. On one hand we find in them no mention of God, aspiration or soul, none of that conscientious perturbation, vagueness or solemn concern that gives us the impression of pro-

fundity or seriousness. On the other we understand nothing of what is said through the structure and tone; and so we grant the author's vivacity but deny his depth.

When Is It a Play?

HOW many times have we heard that a play was interesting but not a play of course, that a statue was good but not sculpture, a building effective but not architecture! It is the kind of thing that people say who prefer a picture of themselves talking sense rather than talking what they like because they like it and finding out artistic principles later. This was said of Shaw when he began, of Chekhov, Brieux, and others. It is the sort of thing that has always been said and always will be.

A piece of writing intended for the theater may be indeed interesting but not for all that a play. Or it may be a play but a very bad one. But if, interesting or uninteresting, it fails to be a play, it will not fail from any cause that the æsthetic reasoners intend. For the most part they are talking nonsense.

They listen to a piece acted in the theater. It moves or entertains them, they admit that, but they have something in their minds which

prevents its passing for a play. This something amounts to a conviction that there is some special way in which a play to be a play must be written, some group of patterns or some formula on which a play is to be built. According to their schools or prejudice they lay down principles and rules.

The hole in the argument appears at once. Who is to say what the formula, the standard, is to be? It is plain that the ways of writing a drama have changed; Sophocles to Shakespeare—Shakespeare to Ibsen—could anything be further apart in a score of outer qualities? On this basis we should never get anywhere with the question. Every new sort of writing brought to the theater, as Shaw brought something new, or Pirandello, will open up at once the old dispute; and only by personal endorsement of this or that formula can anything be decided as to the piece's being a play, though meanwhile perhaps the public goes on crowding to see it. It fares well, it draws crowds, but it is not a play. Something is clearly wrong.

The proof of the pudding is in the eating. Which means that it is a pudding so far as it

goes down pleasantly and nourishes us. So with a play. A play is a piece of literature about a section of life written in such a way that it will go over the footlights, in such a way that what it has to say it can say in the theater. That is the sole test. If it can do this it is a play, good or bad. It is a play in so far as the idea, the content, of it is expressed in theater terms—the space relationships, the time elements, the oral values, the personal medium of the actors, and so on—as distinguished from the terms of literature.

Poetry or art, as Plato says, is a general name signifying that process by which something is where something was not before. We may say that the something that has arrived consists of a form and an idea; the idea was never born till it had the form to express it, the form never existed without the idea to determine it. An idea, whatever other form of existence it may have, does not exist in the theater until it achieves a theatrical body. A play can exist only in theater terms. The question as to whether a play is a play or not rests, as that question in every art does, not on rules or

standards but on one fundamental basis, which is the relation between the idea and the medium.

Is it possible to have a piece of writing, of dialogue, of direct discourse, that will be dramatic and yet not a play? Yes. That means that it is not in terms of the theater; it is dramatic without being theatrical. The look in two people's eyes may be dramatic at a certain moment and yet not be such that you could see it four feet off, much less from the audience; and so it is not theater.

But before we say that, we want to be sure to ask ourselves, What theater is it that these discourses or these expressions like that look in two people's eyes, fail to be? In terms of what theater do they fail to be said? The theater may be dilated in such a manner that dramas not at the moment possible may find in time a theater that can express them. In music, for example, the orchestra makes possible ideas not expressible on the Egyptian pipes and strings. An audience may some day in the future arrive to whom certain qualities may be perceptible and exciting that in this age we cannot convey to our audiences. Audiences now under-

stand and respond to Freudian ideas and Bergson conceptions that would have bored or puzzled the public who went to see Booth and Forrest. What is impossible in one theater and for one audience may under other conditions and for another audience be good theatrical matter.

We have arrived at a point where we seem to be agreeing that stageability is all that is needed to have a play. And this is true in a sense. But what of the play that is worthwhile? When does this—to use Mr. O. W. Firkins's admirable phrase—"flowing vagueness" of the stageable cease to be worthless and become of worth? It may be only trash. What will make it take on value and significance? Are we driven back after all to the formula?

The answer is No, not to any given formulas. Certain general canons and forms have been found to serve in the case of certain kinds of dramatic matter; Aristotle, for example, could establish certain rules for Greek tragedy, rules excellent for dramas that are close to the ideas of Sophocles though less so for Euripides, some of whose plays fail because of the fact that he

could neither use the form to express his matter fully and inevitably on one hand nor, on the other, trim and alter his matter to suit such form. We are driven back not to any formula but to the principle that underlies every formula when it arrives at its full expressiveness and therefore at the point where it is most fully alive. This principle is that within every content, worthless or notable, is implied its form. In any art great matter may be indicated, but it is not expressed until in its own kind there is created a form for it. This form illustrates certain principles and contains its formula no doubt. But when we come to any other work of art, this formula applies only in so far as the two works share the same quality or idea, otherwise it has no point.

You cannot say, then, for example, that such and such is not a play because it violates the unities or is in one long act or has a speech of ten pages' length. But you can say, for example, that when a dramatist—as I remember to have seen once in a manuscript—writes that the heroine turns and walks to the door at the back of the room and as she reaches it

smiles a radiant, happy smile, he may be writing fiction but is not writing in theater terms, since the audience could not see at all the smile, which therefore as theater it does not exist. You can say that Bernard Shaw writing a sentence of thirty lines, three hundred words, is still writing theater, because by means of the steady progression of its parts, by means of its balances and phrases and words, and the click of its thinking, the sentence achieves what will make it speak over the footlights and live in the theater, whereas many a shorter sentence in other writers would spell despair to the actors and to the audience flat apathy.

New Matter

WHEN a new figure, a man like Shaw or Pirandello, appears in the theater with a new work to exist beside the works that we already have, we agree to attack him. Consciously or unconsciously we put him through his trial. We fly at him as fowls would at a newcomer in the barnyard; we try to spur and peck, to crack his head.

The newcomer, however, although he is different, a different shape, with different ways, is a fowl like the rest, and in time his existence will be admitted. The new play is a play, its idea proves itself in the theater, restated in theatrical terms it comes over the footlights alive to the audience. It is an important arrival, new in both form and content, since nothing in art can be new without being new in both. Its idea, then, has been expressed, its soul has found a body, its content a form. In it appears a piece of creation successful because unified throughout; and through this

unity we discern the essential character by which it is different from every other theatrical work. It takes its place, then, in the theater, sometimes after great delay because of its diversity or suddenness; it will survive its epoch a longer or shorter time according to its significance or its fortune. And yet in the nature of things we were right to attack it, to try to bar its place, since in life all birth is attended by struggle and contending forces.

But there is now and again a newcomer in the theater who never quite becomes a part of it. His play is new because the idea in it is new; it is not wholly theater because the artist has not got it expressed in theatrical terms throughout, or at least not to an extent that will carry it over the footlights.

Werfel's *Goat Song* might in the opinion of some be like this, though I should say not; his *Juarez and Maximilian* would be a better illustration. A work of D'Annunzio's like *The Dream of an Autumn Sunset* would be a perfect instance, and his *Dream of a Spring Morning*. These pieces are plainly not theater. Their ideas are luminous and beautiful and rich; but

not in the characters nor the incident nor the style itself, not in the structure nor the kind of heightening employed, is there what will lend itself to expression in the terms of the theater, what will survive the conditions that we know as theatrical, the conditions of space, the *optique du théâtre*, of the immediate presence of the actors, of special time values, sound values and the rest. *Juarez and Maximilian* might prove to be more a play than seemed the case when we saw it given by the Theatre Guild. Its content brings to it a form to which our methods in acting and in production are not altogether adapted and which we might only after prolonged experiment manage to discover—and perhaps not then. That D'Annunzio's two pieces are beautiful writing in verse and in dialogue, are poetic literature, is certain; but nobody would pretend that they are in terms of the theater, even a theater of pure declamation; if such a one existed. Confronted with such a piece as one of these, when it is freshly arrived in the theater, we agree to attack it also, as we did Shaw and Pirandello. This time with more assurance we resist, for the theatrical weakness

of the piece makes its cause weaker to combat or to neglect.

Meantime we go with pleasure and approval to a play of Molnar's or a piece like Bernstein's *Thief*. Both we speak of as plays that are able if not great, as good theater writing, as admirable craft. These playwrights know their business. They are not important as figures in the modern drama; they have no great deal to say, they are not significant artists, but both can write good, working plays.

The question can be raised, then, which of these two sorts of writers in the theater is most important? On one hand we have a poet with his idea trying to express it in theater terms, trying to find a theatrical body for it, and failing for the major part or failing almost wholly. On the other side we have a skillful craftsman, with an idea that he can see as effective theatrical material; with no particular bias or urge of his own; willing to oblige, to trim his sails, to shape the idea to some workable, salable, entertaining form that will go expertly over the footlights? What in each of these is more valuable

in the theater or how does each in his own way serve?

It is the man with the idea, the poet, however incomplete as a dramatist, who is more important.

Craftsmen like Molnar, Eugene Walter and a whole school of Frenchmen like Bernstein and Maurice Donnay have their value to the theater, a very patent value. Plays like Mr. Galsworthy's *Skin Game* and *Loyalties*, either of which is at bottom a thesis presumed but only chattered about in words and carried over the footlights on an arbitrary dramatic frame, have their place and value. Such plays supply entertainment, they keep up the technical machine of play-writing, they keep alive what we might call a kind of technical body in the art. At the same time they obstruct new forms, and thus prevent or distort new contents that need a new form to express them. But that is in the course of all nature, and is only another instance of that force in all created shapes that tends to hold them together as opposed to the force that tends to break them down.

That such plays are often only empty masks over a stale or lifeless content is obvious. A true artist not yet arrived at successful creation may well despise them, while envying perhaps their success in the world. Their security, slightness and willingness to please only puzzle and enrage him, for his own urge and travail leave him no such pleasant traits. They are also further proofs to him of the fact that the second-rate, the imitation, the borrowed and mollified, in art has always a better chance of immediate success than the best ever has.

But for audiences these plays have a genuine appeal. They are first of all entertaining, which any work of art ought to be—our instinct tells us that. And such plays have a knack of proposing a real idea or problem and getting the livelier juices out of it without really going into it at all. We get the sense that we are present at a deep discussion; in reality we have only a deep question raised and scarcely touched. The play touches it only in spots or evades it quite; you can find fifty plays on the same pattern as the one immediately on hand, but they express fifty different ideas, one

form for fifty ideas! The effect of such a play is flattering because of the high matter proposed and comfortable because no high response is really exacted of us. We appear to get the distinction without the pain, the prestige without the cost.

Such dramas, however, it must be said, are by no means to be despised. They are good bad plays. They constitute the main body of the respectably important theater. And when a significant artist does come along, a man trying to find for his content a body that will express it, that will be inseparable from it, he has in them ready to his hand a technical substance, a medium, in which to begin. According to his nature and idea, he will tear it, fight it, cursing and defying it with his enthusiasm and divine intolerance. At best he, perhaps, will grant to one of its practitioners a moderate excellence, and that unwillingly, on the recipe of the Greek epigrammatist who said, "All Cilicians are bad men save only Cinyras, he alone is good, and Cinyras is a Cilician." Or he will twist it or fill it out and carry it to a fresh completion parallel to the high moment in its history when it

was a significant body for a significant soul—as Ibsen did with the general dramatic formula of Scribe and Augier when he carried it to works that paralleled Molière, in whom the general prose method that he employed had found a summit. To wish all this middle in the arts destroyed and thrown into the sea, as Tolstoi did, is individual, essentially barbarous and unsocial. This artistic middle level constitutes a society in art, a general social system and scheme. It is wholesome for the life of the theater as a social system is for men. And within it in the same way arises the individual, to struggle against it, understand it, transcend it, and express himself in its terms and it in his.

But when all is said and done the poet is more important in the theater than any of these competent playwrights who say little but speak so expertly and so well. The reason for this touches on the nature of art and its ways of life.

The energy or stream of life by which creation arises, a discovery of bodies that will contain and express it, goes on and on. Within it are the two principles, one of which seeks al-

ways to discover its due form and to maintain it, and the other which tends to break down this form. This expresses the very essence of what is living, of the fire that in due time "on the ashes of its youth doth lie, consumed with that which it was nourished by." This is what Euripides meant by his God Dionysos, whose body could not be bound by chains or the prison cell, and whose radiant life drew men to their release, glory or destruction.

When in art the life departs from the form, it is left as only a dead fact, a mask that once expressed some reality within. If this work is repeated nevertheless, and goes on being made to serve, despite its inexpressiveness, despite its emptiness, we have only husks, old lumber or else machines, pieces of contrivance that have been found to work up to a point at least. They do not express what they once expressed nor do they express what they assume now to express, though they may be up to a point effective and may still more or less work.

But in the history of ideas, morals, life, art, what counts is not these forms once expressive and not yet fallen from their vital estate.

What counts is not, for example, an idea, a mental form, once understood by being alive and now barren but endorsed by tradition; or an arbitrary morality without spiritual pressure; or a suffocating tragedy like Addison's *Cato*, in the Greek pattern, or Eugene Walter's *Paid in Full* with Ibsen's form taken over, or Mr. Noel Coward's play where the mask of Ibsen's *Ghosts* is used to contain the facile stuff of *The Vortex*. What counts is this force of life as it goes discovering, creating, and fulfilling the forms that reveal and express it. By this a work of art is alive.

This does not mean to imply some progress or evolution toward perfection in the art of the theater as the centuries and epochs pass. We are not discussing progress or improvement. It merely means to describe the process by which in every age works of art have arrived, great or small, but whole, unified in themselves, a form and content one and indivisible.

It follows, then, that the supreme thing in the theater is the arrival of a work of art in which we perceive that an idea has found a theatrical body to bring it into existence. The

more significant the idea the more significant the work of art. But next in importance after this complete achievement comes the idea, the living content.

The poet, then, the maker of life, coming into the theater—even though he cannot wholly express his content in theatrical terms but leaves it only an incomplete experiment in the theater or perhaps only literature—can add to the theater's content. I am not saying that his aim is high, that his reach should exceed his grasp or any such well-meaning platitude. The point is that his substance is alive and through his poetic light is luminous.

It may be that he will get his matter said but partially. But having it to say and straining at the theatrical medium to get it said, he may dilate the whole region of the art. He stretches the theater's capacity for expression. Some later comer may be able to carry farther toward perfection what he has broken ground for. The first spirit may prepare the way and make more free of outer obstacles and inward inhibitions the course of a great artist that follows, as Sydney and the first poets of England's

Renaissance did for Spenser, as he and Marlowe did for Shakespeare. Or some second-rater may, by trimming the edges of his content and by being amiable about the expression he gives to it, make it a part of the theater's matter, as Pinero carried Ibsen into the English theater. One play like Eugene O'Neill's *Hairy Ape*, though it may not succeed in getting into theatrical form his whole idea, is worth to the theater a thousand *Thiefs*, *Loyalties* and *Other Dangers*, however expert they may be.

We may have a hundred good craftsmen in the theater to one poet. They are at home in life and it costs them little. The poet pays as he goes. They see what they do, and it may be good as far as it goes. The poet may or may not always see but he knows that his eyes are alive.

What is true of the dramatist and drama is in its own way true of artists in the other arts of the theater and of these arts, and any discussion of new substance provides a comment on Little Theaters, amateur theaters that is. There are too many of these groups and organizations of late years to be overlooked. What

harm and what good they do to the theater art has become an issue with a hot debate to it.

In the first place Little Theaters by their very natures and *raison-d'être* are more hospitable in their attitude toward departures and new forms in drama than the regular theater is likely to be, and they risk less than the commercial venture, so that what the commercial theater will not even consider is freely welcomed by them. But this is obvious; it is with regard to production, acting or *décor* that they will bear discussion.

These amateurs, militant sometimes and self-confident, help the theater by stretching its range, bringing into it new ideas. They experiment, they have courage and at times genuine vision toward the art's future. To their acting they may bring conviction and a kind of raw faith. They are unspoiled by a mechanical craft that is ready to hand for all effects, and so by the sheer bona-fide response that they give to a play they explode themselves into a rendering of it that a sophisticated actor with his ready-made craft could never attain; they and their acting are closer to the play than

such an actor could ever be. They, in sum, by this freedom and good faith, help to discover an acting form for the play's content. At times their very ignorance or lack of training leads them to methods not intended but really worthwhile and to effects that are moving though not foreseen. They reap a certain excellence from their defects. In production it is the same. The mere lack of traditional method and professional attack may be at times a sort of freedom; which, combined with the crusading will and the enthusiasm of exploration into fresh regions, may lead to fine results. In décor the very poverty of money and material or the limitation in stage space and equipment may, if there be talent too and fresh inspiration, lead the way toward a new economy and excellence in theatrical design.

If these are the benefits, and benefits too valuable to be lost, to the theater art that such groups and organizations can do, there are harms also.

Such amateur groups may hurt the theater by supplying examples of talk and theory rather than actual expression. They are likely to be

full of people who have ideas and have theories of how things should be done, but who cannot do them. In acting, for example, such people may have a conception which they can attempt on the stage and even at times indicate to the audience, without any power to project it, to bring it alive in terms of acting, to make it engaging in such a way that the audience comes back at it with lively response and entertainment and not with mere dutiful appreciation and a patient endurance of good intention.

Too often, too, and most unfortunately such workers feel unduly superior to the commercial theater. They talk too freely about "hokum," by which they mean familiar tricks and the good old stand-by devices that the theater works for its ends, but at the same time they have not enough realized that it is the vitality and reality put into a thing you do rather than its past history that counts. They are too apt to fancy that the professional theater is to be despised somehow for wanting to please and even to make money, though these are perfectly natural inclinations, and when it comes to the point not always despised by the most exalted

enterprises. Such amateur devotees tend toward much too wholesale a scorn for the established or successful. Such an amateur worker may scorn Mr. David Belasco's trimming his sails to the wind of public fads, if you like, and maintain, or shout, that his ideas are never distinguished or deep or bold in spirit. But for him to pitch overboard all the technical resource, tireless effort, canny sense of the audience and the labor or talent for the revision and pointing up of effects, that he has observed in such a theatrical craftsman as Mr. Belasco, is pathetically absurd and more or less fatal. In painting no idea in itself that may be in your head could make you superior to Bougereau; however you may despise him, Bougereau at least could express to the last expertness what he had to express, but your great idea, unless you can paint at least some of it, has nothing to do with painting at all and only messes up the canvas and the argument.

Finally the amateur has done and goes on doing our theater much harm by this contribution toward the breaking down of the line that separates it as an art and a profession from

something that anybody has at will. The modern theater is full of people, who, one way or another, arrive now and then without learning their business, arrive by personality alone, or personality garnished with a slight talent or propelled by a strong current of raw theatrical power, or blessed with some accident of publicity or moneyed patron or a dozen other of those chances that are open to us in our romantic American chaos and riches and abundance of all sorts. To these hit and miss successes we must add the crowds of untrained dreamers, job seekers and egoists that fill our theaters and lower its technical level, confuse art with society and reduce a bright and difficult region to mediocrity and mere private chance. You do the theater, or any art, great injury when you lead the public to think that any one is suited to practice it who wills, that in it all men are born equal. This state of things has gone so far in our American theater that much of it indeed could not be called professional, if, that is, we mean by a profession something that implies training or experience. Commercial is a better word, a great deal of our

THE THEATER

theater is an industry like any other, employing persons and personalities. This the amateur can scarcely hurt. But we can blame him at least for some share in bringing it about.

And yet these amateur theaters cannot be spared. They may break ground for us, and set up a balance to the merely commercial. In the professional they challenge the old methods and the craft that settles into barren mechanics. They remind the theater art of the cost of all growth, the agony of new vision and new birth, and that it too perhaps must lose its life to find it. And most of all they, in the absence of technical craft, drive the artist back to the source of all his art, which is in himself, his quality, intensity and idea; and remind all of us in the art that the kingdom of heaven is within us.

Revivals of Plays

PLAYS often survive their epoch, which is to say they go on being significant as an expression of life. But conditions have changed meanwhile, the theater where they must be played may be different, the conceptions that the audience brings to the theater are different. How to revive the play becomes a problem.

There are numerous theories about the revival of plays. Take a work of Shakespeare's, *Macbeth*, for example. According to one theory *Macbeth* should be revived exactly as Shakespeare made it and as it was produced in his own time. Every one knows this theory from various experiments in what is called Elizabethan production. We all know these occasions, the apron stage, the inner stage, the scenes unchanged, the branch for the forest, the placard for a street in Verona, the audience on the stage, and so on and on, according to the producer's scholarship or sense of the pictur-

esque. This we are told is the only way in which the values in Shakespearean drama can be achieved.

The answers to this theory are several. In the first place we do not know exactly how the play was given in Shakespeare's time. In the second place if we knew and reproduced *Macbeth* exactly as it was when King James saw it, our audience would not understand it, not even in the matter of pronunciation, not to speak of tempo and the stage arrangements and stage conventions. In the third place even if the audience understood, the play would mean something different from what it once meant, in the same sense that a remark of Cæsar's separated by centuries and continents cannot say to us quite what Brutus and Pompey took it to say.

In the fourth place, and finally, there is no lasting state to anything, no is-ness in life by which we can settle something once and for all and have it stay put. The sum of an idea consists in a set of relationships; its truth arises from the relation existing among its diverse elements. It is obvious, to take some examples,

that in the costume of a man whom we must portray as moderate a hat that would be immoderately small in Siena might be moderate in every way in London, or vice versa; that an axiom about decency might apply most to bodily functions in one era and to social fitness in another; or that what was once manly may have become now only brutal or effete. This is true in the moral and intellectual life and it is true in drama. We have the idea, we have the dramatic elements into which it will go. Of these elements the drama is one, the stage conditions another, the conceptions of the audience another and so on. A play is a piece of writing in which the idea has found a theatrical body for itself. The rightness of this theatrical body derives from the relations among its elements. But with the passage of time comes a change in certain elements; to produce the play again the relationship among them must be again discovered. To keep the play alive we must find always anew a body to express this idea. In sum we must translate it into the medium of the moment; we must discover afresh for it the right mental and visual

accents, or it will be dead, an empty mask that no longer contains the life that is there to be expressed.

In *Macbeth* Shakespeare took a story full of the fierce, primitive lust for living, full of haunted moors and the ancient, evil powers of the earth, and gave to it the rich texture of the seventeenth century. To another age than Shakespeare's the fullness of this seventeenth century quality might seem to dim the glare of this older and more primitive quality, quite as a baroque ornament set in a Georgian room might express more brightness and complexity than was intended by it. To yet another age the primitive element in *Macbeth* might express a greater degree of barbarism than Shakespeare meant. In every case, it must be obvious, this drama of *Macbeth* must be restated in the terms of the moment if what is its essential truth is to be given a living theatrical body. To do otherwise may be interesting as archeology, obstinate as academic statistics, quaint as folklore, but in the meantime the necessary life of the play, its essential content, must suffer or be lost.

If, then, the fundamental problem in every revival of a play is how to restate it in such a way as to keep alive its characteristic idea, what shall we say of the type of revival that violates the quality of the play, of Mr. Robert Edmond Jones' and Mr. Arthur Hopkins' revival of *Macbeth* for instance? Well, that too is art. It differs from the intention of which I have been speaking in this respect: it does not aim to express the complete essential nature of the play, it uses the play to express some idea that the producer wishes to express, as Liszt might do with an air of Schubert's or as Michelangelo did with a classic motive in architecture. This is virtuosity sometimes, like one of Liszt's compositions, or it is a sort of creation in which the artist takes the play as a theme or material from which to project his own special creation, as Shakespeare himself may have taken an old play of *Macbeth* and used it to his own ends. In revivals of plays, such a method is justified by its success, by the significance of what it creates. A dozen such violations of *Macbeth* might enlarge in twelve respects the scope and meaning of the

play for us and so dilate its region. In such a method the artist-producer proceeds by his own imagination and at his own peril, his result may be luminous and beautiful or asinine and quite awry.

One thing in every revival of a play must above all come first. This is that you know what your idea is that you either derive from the play or will employ the play to express. To return to *Macbeth* as an example. The average producer of a Shakespearean play has neither culture nor acumen enough to arrive at a sum of what its quality or meaning is for him; he sees no one style to it; he merely gets along from one section of it to another, with hand to mouth conceptions, grasping at one quality or idea after another; which is why in most productions of his plays Shakespeare seems so made up of inspiration, fancy, confusion and mixed effects. The idea that you may have of *Macbeth* cannot of course be fully expressed in words; it eludes mere words and awaits its own theatrical medium, as Beethoven's idea awaited its symphony. But—

word—we may inquire if you wish to create primitive archaisms or baroque complexities or a sense of powers of evil, or what? What is it that you will try to create with this play as the material and with your theater as the medium? You must know. With this clear to you, you can set about finding a body for your idea; and, in so far as you can use your medium, you will achieve a unity, something that is alive, however satisfactory or not it may be to others, or significant in itself.

The Actor

AS all actors who get anywhere at all know in their hearts, the actor is the liveliest part of the theater. Modern invention may spread the visual side of the theater in the moving pictures, the spoken side—perhaps soon the visual also—in the radio, and the theater break up thus into its parts; but actors know that they remain the one element that can be had only in the theater itself, and that they are necessary, therefore, to its very existence. Of all theater elements they are closest to the audience. Of all theater languages acting gets the readiest ear. They are the vehicle of expression on which most depends, and they know that their first business is to get themselves and their matter over the footlights to the audience, to turn all into theater. They sense the fact that nothing counts except in relation to this theatricality. Probability in character, time, action, or likeness, naturalness or truth concern them only with regard to the theater, to projecting

what they create and to getting a response to it from the audience.

Actors sense the difference between acting talent and mere serious intention, and what a part sheer vitality and magnetism play in the actor's achievement. They know how audiences like spirit in an actor, well-adjusted egotism, engaging exhibitionism, power, assurance, the impression of success—know how wise is the Spanish proverb that every one likes the victor—*siempre es simpático el que vince*. And they know that while the production of the play is being presented to the audience, they themselves are, of all the agents at work in this complex art, the chief, they are the protagonists. More than the designer's, who created the décor; or the dramatist's, who gave the play and the central theme; or the director's, who controlled and shaped the enterprise as a whole, their mystery and power are felt by the audience; they are the singers in the song. By instinct, intuition and talent, actors that are functioning in their art know these things, have all this straight. Whether they can explain them or not, they exemplify the principles of

their art. And audiences by the same intuition follow them freely.

We should not hold it against them then if actors often show how human they are by being frailty and innocence itself when they come to analysis and theory. Every one of us philosophizes over life to some extent at least, every actor does a little theory on his own. Then begins a confusion indeed, an æsthetic Babel, the ballad of the babes in the wood. Sometimes the actor's theory is a prattle of mere made-up explanations, like a man in the midst of a love affair trying to talk the psychology of sex. He will tell you, for example, that he has got to be natural, to be like life, when all the while what he is trying to do on the stage is not to represent a natural person or action but to present naturalness itself, to project into the audience what he thinks the natural is. He may tell you that he must keep to the truth, when there is in fact no truth of time, place or anything else that holds him except in relation to the effect he aims at, for he goes as fast or as slow as he likes, jumps his scenes over the earth, in the house one minute,

the next on the sea, now speaking plain words, now bursting into song, now walking, now dancing.

Or he may be another sort of actor, one who is high up in ideas from an art theater perhaps or a personage most regularly educated and strictly cultured before becoming an actor. He puts his brains to work upon the problems of his art. He talks, theorizes, paints too little with his brush and too much with his tongue, as Rodin said of Whistler, and so muddles up the whole question of the relation of his art to the theater. He arrives at diverse conclusions, according to his epoch, the group he runs with, or the teachers he has had. Actors, he concludes perhaps, should be themselves. Acting is being natural. Or artifice is out-of-date and false. An actor should be the part he plays. Be sincere. There are a hundred theories; sometimes held by people who can only think, not act; sometimes talked by good actors who do the right thing and are only confused when they try abstractions and principles, who act like monarchs but talk like poor Poll. Some of them think straight, but most of them if they

carried out the theories they announce would break their necks and the theater's neck, or at least be far worse players than they are now. But this, as Cicero said of the early orators before he arrived, is a horrid way of speaking—*asperum et horridum genus dicendi*.

Of all these theories the one actors suffer most from lies in the naturalistic direction, and comes to them from the realistic drama. Compared to the actor, the dramatist, producer and designer are free; they can go forward toward new styles, can inject into the theater their ideas, which the rest of the theater can follow; the actor is the product of the theater of his epoch. He does not point the way, he cannot begin a new style or method, for no matter what the theater becomes, he is essentially a theatrical medium. He develops what is supplied him by the dramatist or producer, what their style is his style must be if he interprets for them. The main body of drama in our time has been realistic in method; and the acting of our time has developed out of that drama. And though a realistic actor may be great, just as a drama that employs realism

may be great, the fact remains that realism is elusive; for the ordinary craftsman it is harder to achieve distinction when the sole requirement imposed upon him is to represent nature. Realism is the easiest method in which to miss style.

In the acting of our day one deadly principle has taken the lead: the actor should present to us the emotions he has experienced by putting himself in the character's place. This implies sincerity, naturalness and the rest of that familiar list of qualities, and might by twisting it be made to apply to acting of all kinds. But the danger of such a theory in most actors' hands is great. In naturalistic rôles an actor if he has the talent can go far on this basis of putting himself in the character's place and then expressing the emotion he feels in a given situation. Mr. David Warfield, for example, in *The Music Master* could by his imagination and dramatic sympathy put himself in the old man's place, could feel what he felt, and by his admirable craft could create all this for us. But when he tried Shylock that was another matter; his Shylock was a Ghetto

father, with all the simplicity, intensity, fanaticism and pathos of his type. Mr. Warfield could give us what he felt in Shylock's place and what he gave us was genuine and moving emotion. But the point is that he could not put himself in Shylock's place. He gave us what he felt as Shylock, but could not feel the Shylock of Shakespeare. He could not enter into this persecuted Jew in a seventeenth century fantasy, a character with his due ferocity and scars but seen, nevertheless, through the perspective of a Venetian comedy written by a Renaissance poet. The trouble, obviously, with this theory is in its first term. Mere sincerity of intention does not necessarily put an actor into the character's place; nor does mere genuineness of emotion on the actor's part give us the right emotion for the character. After all, what we are interested in is the rôle, not the actor's feeling natural.

There is no reason, however, why actors should be artists in words or artists in æsthetic theory. No doubt such a state of things would be most desirable, but we have no more right to demand such accomplishments of an actor

than we have to ask Shakespeare to model the statue of Lucrece, or Mozart to write poems, so long, that is, as the actor has something to say in his own language, which is acting.

Acting is an art in which the artist uses himself, his body and voice, as a medium. The actor takes from a drama a person and the dramatist's comment on the person; he brings his inspiration and technique to the dramatist's imagination. This creation of the dramatist's he restates in terms of acting, bringing into existence a new creation that was not before. This creation of the actor's has then to be restated in relation to the whole play, the theme and the characters; it must be given its proper mask; and by this it becomes a part of another body, of the whole theater work that is to be created.

Technical training and skill in his art develop and perfect the actor as a medium of theatrical expression, that is obvious. But there is an element about him that we may speak of as pure acting medium, which he has largely by birth, or to some extent by cultivation, and at his best by both.

We may speak of five aspects of this medium.

There is first—and most baffling of all when we seek explanations—the theatrical person, the player who goes vividly over the footlights. Some players click as they appear on the stage, we watch them because they in themselves seem to exist in theater terms, as contrasted with good actors whose presence is interesting only by skill in their art or beauty or some pleasing personal quality. This theatricality is not to be confused with the popular *sex appeal*, an actor may not be conspicuously appealing in this way and yet may be theatrical, may project readily into theater terms; just as some voices, good or bad, engage your ear at once. Indeed for the actor this personal theatricality corresponds to what a real singing voice—a voice whose life is at once contagious for the hearer—is to the singer, good or bad.

Second, there are the natural assets that the actor has for his business. This may be some great beauty or presence, or an effective body in shape and flexibility, or a good theater mask, or all of these, down to a skin that takes the

make-up well, an advantage in which actors greatly vary.

A good theater mask implies contours and conformations that can project themselves over the footlights into the theater, eyes that can be seen, cheekbones that will not crowd them, teeth whose glitter carries a smile to the farthest row in the theater, and so on. What one actor, though a profound artist, may succeed in creating only in the course of a long scene, another who is more or less a fool may establish the first minute he is on the stage merely because his brow has a noble outline, a splendid serenity upon it, or because the bone structure of his eye sockets, by throwing stage shadows over them or allowing room for black-leading, conveys the effect of tragic romance. A voice may express to its hearers a score of things that the speaker neither intends nor could understand. Such endowments as these are unescapable elements in the actor as a medium. They have not necessarily anything to do with soul, training or artistic intelligence; they are to the actor what the violin, good, bad or indifferent, is to the violinist.

Third, there is the time sense. One of the most expressive languages in the theater is that of the time intervals. Actors with a sense of rhythm and an instinct for pause, cues and general tempo, can easily achieve sometimes what players who are much better artists reach only with great elaboration. Mr. Glenn Hunter, for example, who is a player without much imaginative scope, can often hit at once by means of his time values what Mr. Morgan Farley, who has far more genuine artistic understanding but less acting gift, can approach only indirectly and laboriously.

Like the time sense but in the region of the eye, is the actor's sense of movement and line. Here he transfers the time sense into visual motion, whose rhythm, pattern and intervals become in themselves expressive as the rhythm in a ballad or a scherzo is expressive, as Michelangelo's design in line and mass is expressive in his Campidoglio, or as a spiral says a thing so very different from what an oval says. The flow of Charlie Chaplin's gesture and movement is unbroken and complete; Chaliapin in Boris exhibits a visual rhythm that is superb

and superbly related to his own particular body and stature and wholly calculated in terms of them. It is through this visual music that the actor is related to one of the theater's chief and most elusive elements, its movement. It is through this that he draws from us a response akin to that we give to music and dancing, and as powerful, distinct and hard to describe or remember exactly. Under this head falls the capacity for wearing costumes, which, in fact, come alive on the stage only through the wearer's sense of moving line. This sense for the pure visual medium must not be confused with the gift of mimicry. Mimicry works through the medium of gesture of course but it turns on resemblance.

A mimetic gift in the actor corresponds to a good ear in the musician. It is a great advantage, but will not of itself make him an artist. Many good actors have little talent for mimicry. Mimicry is to acting what memory can be to culture and education, and like memory it must not be too easily despised. The imitation of others is an instinct born deep in us, and is the source of the actor's art. Acting is

essentially based on men's actions as we see them in our daily experience; and an aptitude for imitating these actions may be taken as the first ready test of a man's born gift for this particular art. In the theater there is always to be found a sort of person, often intelligent enough, who can think, theorize and describe acting till we might mistake him for a player of some skill. The way to show such persons up at once is to let them imitate the simplest action of men and women and to see how certain they are to miss it flat. This gift for mimicry in the actor is like a gift for likeness in a painter. Such a knack will not make his drawing fine, but it will give him a kind of solid reality which he can begin with and which he can alter and force to his own ends. Corot takes the landscape as the material for the expression of his idea; it is plain that he can express his idea more adequately if he knows the exact appearance that he works from, and that we, on the other hand, by knowing just what he has done to this material know better what he has expressed. In order to translate a gesture into elegance or extravagance or drunkenness an

actor may best begin by being able to reproduce the actual literal gesture that he sees in life. To that literal and basic gesture the shortest cut lies in the power of mimicry. All of which amounts to saying that it is from this actual, literal gesture and the knowledge of what it would be in any given case that all style evolves. The reason most of our extremely stylized productions seem so poor and misled is because the actors lack the needed style; and they miss this style because they do not command the simple, straight acting from which the style departs.

To these basic endowments and faculties in the actor we must add—as we must do, not only with the actor but with any artist—the rest of him, all that spiritual and mental and personal and peculiar sum that for want of a better word we should call himself. The sum of all, of himself plus his special acting gifts, is what the actor brings to his art, is what qualifies him as the medium of acting. He remains himself as pigment remains pigment in painting and in sculpture marble remains marble.

It follows therefore that the actor, being the medium that he works in as an artist, is never

the character that he plays, or we should have no art. Even a Mr. Tom Jones acting himself on the stage would have to project in theater terms his own notion of himself and his relation to the rest of the play. Even in such a case the actor cannot play from nature. He plays from an idea, which he sets up and which if you like he may have drawn from nature. He is Mr. Jones but the Mr. Jones projected into his acting is another matter. To say that another actor playing this part does not act Mr. Jones, he *is* Mr. Jones, makes such nonsense that it defeats itself. If it were not a matter of conception and presentation we should not be going around in a circle admiring the actor for being Mr. Jones without being him. The actor is always himself, in every rôle he is himself. But he is himself only as a medium for his idea. He uses himself, his body, his voice, and the elusive personal quality that goes with these, exactly as Titian uses paint or Haydn sound, to create a form for his idea.

The relation of acting to emotion is an old problem in the art; the theories on the subject are many. Quintilian in the first century de-

clared that the actor moves others by being moved himself; which means that to make others weep you must first weep yourself. Diderot and Coquelin defended the famous paradox that you can be a great actor only on the condition of complete self-mastery and the ability to express feelings that are not felt, feeling perhaps even that you could not feel; by which last is meant that the actor can by a synthesis build up an image of emotions that are beyond his power to feel, that are ideal—as Greek sculptors created bodies beyond human perfection. These are the two extreme positions, and between them lie the various doctrines, theories and dogmas that would describe acting either as emotion once felt, at least, or imagined, and then translated into some expression in acting, which in turn is then to be repeated in performance after performance; or as inspiration, trusting to what comes at the moment on the stage; or as the warm heart and cool head that Joseph Jefferson spoke of, and so on and so on.

There could be no way of settling this time-worn argument. One man can experience an

emotion repeatedly with more readiness than another; one has less need than another to feel the emotion at the moment in order to act it. There is another point also. Granted that an acting form has been found that will express the emotion and that the actor repeats when he wishes to express again this emotion, the fact remains that one actor may be more affected by the thing he does than another. By which I mean that he more than the other is excited by the acting that he does and is led back again by it to the emotion that it first arose from and expressed. Actors vary too in their strength of memory; one may have a better memory for form than the other, he can more readily recall just what he did when he first expressed the emotion; another may more easily remember the emotion itself and may on each occasion struggle anew for its expression. Actors, like artists in every art, vary in the extent to which their form or style, independent almost of whether it expresses a sincere emotion or not, is in itself engaging. In Mr. David Warfield's playing, for instance, a marked sense of his craft would be distressing, for a certain genuine

and natural conviction is a part of his effect; in Chaliapin the artist's style itself is exciting, some of his movements and vocal technicalities engage us, regardless of what is behind them, exactly as the play of Veronese's brush, or the sumptuous artifice of his figure arrangement, is a part of what his picture says to us.

All this may indeed be true, but there is one point at least that we must not be confused about, which is that we must never fall into the notion that emotion *per se* or any other reality in the player himself, makes acting; which finally depends on expression, and expression arrives only through the acting medium and technique. The fundamental principle in this debate over acting and emotion is that a form be found in terms of acting that will express to the audience a certain experience of the character. Acting may be bad for lack of the right form to express what is to be expressed, or because the form projected is empty of content, a sort of right form in the wrong place. But emotion with no projected form that will express it to the audience, is not acting at all.

To create in this medium of himself the actor needs technique. Acting is a language in the theater that must be learned. Without technique the actor cannot know the resources of rhythm, what tempo is, what the voice means to such ends as his, or how to recognize effects when he does get them, to retain from these what is most expressive and to repeat it when he wills. Through the avenue of technique the actor approaches all wit, elevation, variety and depth of style. Through his technique he establishes that firm outline that divides his creation from reality and heightens it into art. Without technique, however wonderful his own quality may be, he has no language to speak. Through technique he learns the use of his medium. Through technical labor he gets an intellectual discipline that helps to clarify his ideas; which in their turn are developed by this search for their right technical form.

If cultivation in his technique helps the actor's use of his medium, cultivation in general, a culture in thought, arts and living, will help his idea. Culture in other arts will nourish and promote the conceptions that he brings

to his own. The technical qualities in one art can be transferred to another. You can take rhythm or emphasis, for example, and apply their expression in architecture to music or acting. The structure of Milton's style in *Samson Agonistes* is not unlike Michelangelo's in its formalism, pedantry, nobility and controlled but intense emotionalism. The rich texture of Veronese once felt and understood affords an approach to the texture of Shakespeare's writing. The phrasing in good music can throw light on the thought phrase and on word phrasing. I should think that Debussy would be the best guide to many a drama of Maeterlinck's, since the quality of their mood is so totally suggested in some of his music; and nothing, perhaps, could teach us more about acting Sheridan than the furniture and objets d'art of the period. An emotional or spiritual culture and exercise in one art enriches the substance that we bring to another. The dilation of his mental horizon by knowledge and ideas furthers the actor's opinion into sane judgment and his choice into distinction; it furthers too his understanding of the play and of his rôle in

all its meanings and parts; the range, intensity and glamor of his own living cannot be divorced from the nature of his conceptions. The actor needs always to make of himself a material beautiful in quality and diverse in range for his art's sake; even the finest building is more beautiful for its marble's beauty.

Through the creation of his idea into acting form, the actor achieves a work of art, complete in itself and free of its material. If he had power behind the idea and the expression of it, he could, if he chose, do a beggar, not in whining rags but in the most exalted declamation and elegance. It will be an extreme case of unlikeness, and he will have to contend with the disappointment or resentment that we feel when we see what is a familiar fact so contradicted or distorted; he will have to convince us of the particular truth that he is expressing. Or he could take the reverse direction and do his beggar in shreds and patches. On the other hand he could do a king in robes and heroic speech, as in *Æschylus*; or in homely cotton and the simplest realism, as in certain beautiful and moving folk dramas and rituals. The

principle remains the same, which is the freedom and completeness of a work of art. The actor is as free of his material as any other artist. But the fact remains, nevertheless, that in acting this freedom is more dangerous, since acting of all arts rests most on imitation and arouses therefore more than any other art a strong demand for likeness. It happens too that the lively instinct for imitation born in us has us doing the stage characters inside ourselves before we know it; before we know it we are acting them, and so are doubly critical over resemblances and jealous of the facts of appearance and similarity.

But whether he works close to the surface of his material or remote from it, the actor must have one chief concern. Having made of himself an expressive medium, he must be concerned with his idea or conception. It is by that that he persuades toward himself the stream of life that moves in others and becomes, like the beloved man in Bianor's poem, "lord of another's soul"—*ψυχῆς κύριος ἀλλοτρίας*. The poet when he speaks himself, Aristotle says, creates no image—in the same

sense we may say that the actor merely being himself is not an artist. Homer, he says, admirable as he is in every other respect is especially so in this, that he knows the part to be played by the poet himself in the poem. Only by his idea does the actor know his share in the whole work of theater art that he serves; the rest of him is merely used by the director and the dramatist; it is mere medium like the paints, canvas and lighting.

The Director

BEHIND every production that we see in the theater stands the director. He may be some one brought in to keep things from scattering in every direction, a sort of overseer and little else. He may be an ignoramus who gets a chance to be a boss, or an actor with a few tricks up his sleeve who is given charge over the company. He may be a fairly able fellow whose office is to get good curtains, keep the cues going and the stars to the front, or a fine artist who brings the theater work into being, its parts justly related and its idea expressed. The importance or recognition of the director varies with various epochs. In the Attic theater the archon oversaw the production of a play; the manager in the Elizabethan theater bought, wrote, adapted and directed plays. In the modern theater the director has been more signaled out and popularly recognized than

ever before. There are people, even, to whom the director or *régisseur* seems the most important element in a theatrical occasion.

The director has the same relation to the theater that the orchestra conductor has to music. He has no parallel in the other arts. He uses his actors as the conductor uses his musicians, and is related to the play as the conductor is to the score. The conductor is an artist since he creates a musical body for the idea that he derives from the score. The director is an artist, good or bad, since he creates a theatrical body for the idea he has from the play. He is an artist or he is nothing.

Directors move more toward virtuosity when they take the play only as material for some idea that they wish to express. They are not concerned with giving us the play's idea so much as their own. An extreme virtuoso in the theater uses the play as the other sort of director uses the actors or the *décor*, it does not provide the main idea or the mood of the theater work but is employed to express his idea. He does not develop the play for what is in it but uses it to create a sort of drama of his own.

He distorts the play and forces it to ends not its own but his. A familiar piece of virtuosity, so long known to so many that it no longer is seen to be such, is what is usually done to *The Merchant of Venice*. The seventeenth century comedy, with its light fable conceived in all the verve, vivid elaboration, brutality and lyricism of its time, is turned into the tragedy of a suffering Jew, and the leading actor in the part is directed to wring it dry for its last drop of pathos, race problem, social injustice and bitter edge. A brilliant piece of virtuosity, frowned on by many, was the Hopkins-Jones production of *Macbeth*, where the Shakespearean substance of the play was distilled to an essence at once profound, haunting and macaber; and the drama and the scene that we saw on the stage seemed translated to our own viscera and the realms of our subconscious. The line between extremes in directing cannot be too sharply drawn. Most directing has in it streaks of more or less unintentional virtuosity that comes from a strong personal bias of the director toward the play. In general we may say that virtuosity sinks or swims by the significance of

its idea. As a rule we rightly prefer the play's idea to some twist in a director's head.

The director that concerns us most tries to translate as closely as possible into the theatrical medium the idea or characteristic quality of the play he directs. He reads and responds to the play; in him the experience that the dramatist created in the play is recreated, he lives it again, he decides what its quality is to be, and with the means at hand sets out to express this quality. It is with regard to the play that this sort of director and the virtuoso differ from one another. With regard to the other elements in the theater their problem is the same.

The capable director has three considerations that are most important in his use of the theatrical medium ready to hand.

First of all he must study his problem with his eye on the use of all the elements involved. I mean this:

The director begins with the idea that he has deduced from the play that he is to present in a theater. He had as mediums through which this idea may be conveyed, the play, the acting,

the décor, the stage movement. He must sense what in the idea will best be expressed in one medium, what in another, as one might know, for example, that a general mood is best expressed in music, a proverbial maxim in words, a concrete scene in painting. He must in sum before he goes very far with his more practical steps, with rehearsals and other proceedings, perceive what portion of the whole creation each of his mediums is to express.

He must consider how much, for example, of the burden of the occasion is to fall to the acting, in Gorki's *Lower Depths*—to take a good play—it is the individual characterizations, the ensemble and the mutual exchange among the actors, that must convey the idea to the audience; in *The Music Master*—to take a poor play—everything depends on the acting, on the pathos and sentiment that the actors create. The director will consider too how much of the burden will fall to the dialogue itself. In Congreve's *Way of the World*, for instance, the setting is nothing, a chamber not too bad is good enough, or even a curtain or some one's drawing-room will do; what counts

is the words, they count even more than the acting that follows them. Congreve's words are his main vehicle, and the dialogue is his director's main reliance. He will decide how much he will trust to the time values in speech and action as the best element for the play's expression, remembering that just as the truth of a mile is its length, a part of the truth of a man's remark is its duration, and of two speeches the time interval between them. In most productions too little is said in these values and too much left to the lines and characters.

What is true of the time values in directing is quite as true of the visual rhythm in the stage movement. In a play like Lenormand's *Les Ratés* each of the eleven scenes establishes a single action or event in the progress of the plot, and is very short, the dialogue concentrated; it needs therefore the fullest aid possible from other elements besides the lines and the gestures and the setting. In each scene so far as possible a certain pattern of movement needs to be created. This pattern stamps on our minds the relation of the characters to each other in what

they are doing at the moment. For instance there is such a pattern inherent in the scene in which the man comes in drunk. He staggers from the door to the chair opposite, the woman from her bed by the door comes to him, she leans over him as he talks, she kneels to undo his shoes, at the sight of his degradation she drops her head on his knees. There is one line of movement, one single pattern that expresses the scene's idea, the idea of his ruin, of her love and grief folded like wings around him. In the cathedral scene where the man confesses his infidelity to the woman, the two of them, when the rest of the company have filed out, remain seated together at the base of a column and in the midst of the vast spaces of the darkening church. By this design in stage position they seem bound together, small, defeated, pitiful; and what happens to them seems to pour from the two of them there and down on them. In a scene from one of Charlie Chaplin's films his movement establishes a flowing line from start to finish and much of what remains in our minds is the pattern of it.

The director can consider how much of the

content of a theater work will most fully appear in atmosphere and design, how much, that is, he will depend for his effects on the décor provided the play. The right setting for the second act of Mr. Shaw's *Cæsar and Cleopatra*, for example, will be half the battle; that scene with the infinite desert by night, the shadowed, inscrutable, somber Sphinx, the rising moon that casts its immortal silver dusk over these and over the characters there, conveys to the audience the mood of time and power against which the ironic poetry of the lines will be true.

And finally the director must see all these theater elements together, with what they express, and must relate them into a unity. There will be many avenues of expression all leading to the whole theatrical body created. The glory of the theater is that it comes so close to human life that it breaks up into all our channels of response and expression; all are alive together and through all the whole sum appears. This insight into the revealing power of each of these theater mediums amounts after all only to the director's being alive in it. Through these diverse avenues he seeks life for what he

desires to create, exactly as in our daily experience we look at one thing and listen to another, or as we fling ourselves on words, on song, on color, on rhythm, action, ideas—"sowing ourselves on every wind"—in order to create ourselves in terms of living.

Within the nature of the play itself there is a problem for the director. He must see the play in its entirety, what aspect of it needs emphasis, what subordination, and what its main themes are and the sequence of its parts. *Othello*, for example, lives in its outline. The round pattern of the plot and of the leading characters is what expresses the idea, within this outline the shadings appear. Any detail or subjective stress that holds up the movement for a moment by just that much impedes the dramatic eloquence and sweep of the whole. Latin plays, from the modern Spanish for instance or from Goldoni's or Molière's theater, need strong outlining, the director must put the emphasis on the outline first of all, or the combinations and meanings of the play will be lost. A play like Chekhov's *Three Sisters* needs a distributed monotony of emphasis, its quality is

inward and atmospheric, and its idea appears in the diffused, not in the clear, boundaries of the thwarted plot. In *Tartuffe* the most intense stress should come in the third quarter of the play; the very last five minutes of it should have the same equable urbanity as the first five; the parallel in tone between these beginning and final intervals expresses the state of mind into which Molière wishes the play to settle. In *Ghosts* there are balancing emphases in the first act and the last. In Wiers-Jenssen's *Witch* the two motives of love and of witchcraft are arranged to balance one another and need to be kept so in the emphasis, or the point of the play is lost. The most important thing about directing Goldoni's *Fan* is to sustain the quick cues; it was largely for lack of this that the play failed of success when it was first produced, as Goldoni himself tells us.

There is another respect in which plays differ importantly and where the director's failure to see the point can distort a play or blur its effect. This turns on the relation of the lines and actions to the whole of the play. In Chekhov's plays, in *Ivanoff* for example, what the various

persons do and say is characteristic of them; they are defined and expressed by what they say and do, and their words and actions in turn contribute to the plot and to the play's whole idea. In a play like Pirandello's *Così è, se vi pare* many of the speeches could be said by any one of half a dozen characters; they do not relate to the particular character saying them so much as they do to the building up of the theme, they are like steps in an analysis. In the New York production of Pirandello's *Henry IV*, the expository scene spoken by the four pages failed of its dramatic function because of the actors' individualizing their speeches, making, or trying to make, them proceed from themselves. By this they lost the speed and continuity right for the scene; what we got was four people more or less expressing themselves on a point, where we should have gotten the effect of a point streaming through a brain, with the various arguments clashing and running against each other. The director needs always to study to know when a speech, or an action, is directly related to the play's plot or its whole idea; when it is related first to

the character and through the character to the whole; and when it is much less related to the whole than it is to the character, of which it is a pleasing perhaps but arbitrary detail, or even a mere further exploration pursued beyond the play's advantage.

The director has next to consider his use of the actor, for the actor is his cardinal medium. On the acting hangs much of the play's immediate fortune.

To say, as some say, that the director must be an actor himself, must know how to do the thing he wishes the actor to do, is wrong. The conductor need not be able to play every instrument in his orchestra, as the architect who uses colored windows in his creation need not know how to paint glass. Obviously the director who is a good actor has a certain advantage, since he can show his company exactly what to do. But even that conclusion is not too final, and for three reasons: first, you can be a fine artist and have no gift at all for passing it on to another person; second, you can have a fine conception and technical knowledge to offer others, even though you yourself are without any gift

for that lively creation that will make your idea into acting; and, finally, there is often a real advantage in giving an actor not something to copy exactly but something that furnishes a lead, on which he can proceed to his own creation.

Directors vary in their use of actors. At one extreme is the director who lets the actor alone, does not say do it this way or that, but how would you do it? This method has certain merits. It freshens the acting by bringing into it more of the actor's own quality and own way of creation. It encourages his soul toward the expression of its own particular nature. It stiffens the dramatic texture by sharpening or leaving fresh the individual units whose contact or reactions make up the scene. The disadvantages are quite as obvious. Provided we have good actors and provided there are only two or three persons in the scene the result may be excellent, but good actors are not always to be had for the asking, and souls of depth and distinction are not universal, even in a democracy. Few plays consist of scene after scene with two or three characters in it. And even if

we have such a play the whole of it needs its analysis and its right emphasis of parts, needs to be plotted out by an overseeing eye and to have this plot securely stated in the acting. For ensemble scenes, crowds, masses, groups, this method is worthless.

Of this general method in the use of actors, though not at the extreme of course, Mr. Arthur Hopkins is the most conspicuous example. But Mr. Hopkins, while he has given many plays such quality as no other producer could have achieved, has doubtless ruined as many. He has his own special flair, but for directors who are without this flair he is a dangerous example. What Mr. Hopkins has is a certain sense of the theater in bold or spiritual directions and a nose for certain kinds of personal distinction or poignancy in actors. He has a strong magnetism that is stimulating to many artists. And he has a fine and very genuine desire that you may be free in your own soul and in your own way of expression. What he lacks is a command of the traditional theater craft, which, though often trite and empty, constitutes nevertheless the solid basis of crafts.

manship on which this, like every other art, can most securely rest.

The other extreme is the director who gives his actors their entire business, how to do every part of their rôles, even to the tone of voice; he assigns their stage positions, regulates their conceptions of the rôles, and holds the entire production tight in his own hand. No director hits this extreme, but many have the general intention of such a control and such a prescription for their results.

The advantages of this method are evident. There is a better chance for a regulated whole, for a general shape and meaning to the play when it has been translated into acting. The characters have a more just relation to one another and to the play. The rapport or exchange between the actors is more flowing and unified. There is less that is hit and miss, there are fewer gaps that arise from private temperament and chance moods. The disadvantages lie in the direction of the mechanical, the perfunctory, the platitude, acting that has lost its spring, effects that have no relation to the person creating them.

The escape from these various disadvantages in methods will best be made through a combination of the two. There is an overseeing eye and controlling head that assigns the fortunes of each individual actor and the relationships proper to the play. But at the same time every actor may be led to express in his own terms what he has to express, and this, in so far as can be done without harm to the rest of the enterprise, be retained, so that the actor may be using as fully as possible that which is the medium of his art, I mean himself. Through this being alive and himself he remains an artist rather than a puppet, and is a living part of the whole theater art that the director works in.

Finally the director works in terms of another element in the theater, the audience. He must consider not only what he wishes to express but also what will express it and not something else to the audience that he will speak to.

It goes without saying that if Euripides' *Bacchae* with its theme of the redeemer God and the Dionysian release were presented for an

audience of novices in a theological seminary and for an audience of rebellious young socialists, the play's meaning in each case would be different, in one case an attack on the Christian legend and in the other an encouragement to freedom or license, neither of which is Euripides' idea. *Julius Cæsar* to a Moscow audience in the year of Lenin's death would spell far more of the revolutionary than it would do to a college audience in America, to whom it might mean largely an academic classicism. To secure its vitality and to express its essential quality or idea the director would have in each case to create his production within the terms of his audience. What, in a scene with nervous perturbation for its theme, might seem to an American audience rather casual than otherwise might express something too much of jumping nerves to men of Edinburgh.

The dramatist shares the situation of all arts in that his necessity is to arouse a response by which he can create in others what he has in himself. But the dramatist writing his play knows that he can state his idea as his inspiration dictates and that it may go straight

to the audience's perception or may wait ten years before its elements will be seen in the right perspective and his idea be truly perceived. The case of the director is different. His immediate audience presses in on him more closely as one of the terms in which he must work. That final theater creation that he seeks is not so much like literature in its quality as it is like music, dancing, vivid passages in the world of nature about us; it is elusive, penetrating, it cannot wait, it cannot depend on some later memory or revisiting. He has the problem, and perhaps the thrill, of knowing that in his art, just as in human life we are alive and then gone, what he creates lives while it is before the audience, with all that living may imply—its passionate exchange, its leaping ardor and its give and take of beauty and quick impulse—and afterward has no existence at all.

Décor

ELECTRICITY and mechanical progress have carried the theater a long way from what it was when Aristotle was so easily able to say of the spectacle or *décor* that, though an attraction, it was the least artistic of all the parts of the theatrical art and had least to do with creation. The designer has become one of the important artists of the modern theater.

There are people no doubt who would deny it, but we could say, I think, that, of all the arts, words come first as the medium by which the culture of the human race has most been handed on, or at least this is true of the Western races. Words may not be the deepest or purest, but they are the most immediate, universal and socially necessary medium of expression that we employ. Certainly it is true that, whatever may be said of them in their own spheres, painting and architecture do not come first in the theater as mediums for conveying the idea. For a single occasion the importance of the *décor* will

of course vary with the quality of what is to be expressed, whether it comes out best in words or music or acting or visual design. In general, the play and the acting come first; they are far ahead of the décor as means of expressing the dramatic idea.

As to the realistic settings so frequent in the theater of the last half century and often so costly in their demands, it is plain they are the natural children of the realistic drama and the "free theaters." The concern about realistic detail that troubles so much modern drama becomes the pride of such designers as aim to give us reality to the last item. These realistic designers wander in the same confusion as the dramatists and the public over the relation of art to nature, and much of their effort is as inconsequent, incidental and unimagined. It is obvious that the fundamental principle involved in realistic décor is the translation of the real material, such as a room or a scene, into the quality of the play. More often than not this translation does not happen; and for lack of it all those familiar stage tricks of reproduction, duplication of objects, sounds and places that

excite a childish delight by being so exactly contrived, are low forms of theater; they are not part of the dramatic moment; they stick out of themselves and thus intrude on the right dramatic content or idea.

To such unrelated reproduction, or photography, as this last we may object, since it is not art at all. To realistic décor we can have no objection when the quality it goes with is realistic—no setting could be more perfect than that the Moscow Art Theatre gave to Chekhov's *Cherry Orchard*; it was an element in a fine theater work in which the play, the acting, the décor and the directing all had one texture and all contributed toward a theatrical body for the informing idea. To admire realism in stage design merely because it presents some new trick or carries farther some ingenious effect of actuality is only puerile. To object to it because it is out of date or not the newest thing is superficial, faddish and idle. The necessary thing in every case of course is creative imagination by which the setting becomes cousin to the play.

Words cannot convey what such settings are

like, but I may cite such instances as the mob scene in Reinhardt's *Miracle*, for which Mr. Norman Bel-Geddes did the design, or Mr. Robert Edmond Jones' designs for *The Hairy Ape* or *The Great God Brown*, or some design like that of Mr. Ernest de Weerth's for a drama of the French Revolution in which the form of the guillotine is present in diverse lights and disguises throughout every scene, suggesting in one a doorway, in another a lattice, or a wood, a courtroom, and so on. Of this kind of décor we may say that if realism in décor can sink to mere photographic repetition and tricky clap-trap, this other extreme can drop to mere obvious allegory and platitudes of stylization. In our French Revolution drama, for example, this contrivance of the guillotine form in every scene may have in it a source of power, it may unify and excite our responses. But it is not in itself necessarily any more imaginative than the more photographic representation of the doorways or wood or courtroom would be. It may make more demand on the spectator's imagination if you like, since he has to conjure up for himself this diversity of places. But this extra

effort on the audience's part does not imply extra imagination on the scenic artist's, if that were so the man who put a drop of water in the middle of the bare stage and made us guess that it presented the chamber in which Lady Macbeth had tried to wash the blood from her hands, would be the greatest artist in all theater design. The trouble with symbols and stylizations is often that, the symbol or motif once found, it is not used with imagination, so that as soon as we have found the key to it it begins to grow flat and unexpressive. Mere elimination of likeness or mere stylization need not in themselves imply anything beyond a certain novelty, if that. This confusion over what is and what is not imaginative has made a great mess in modern theatrical design.

To have an actor use a mask to show us what he is in another man's eyes as contrasted with what he is to himself when shown without the mask, may be a visual device happily suited to the play in hand, it may be in complete unity with the quality of the idea and the writing and to that extent imaginative creation. But it gets no further except in so far as the artist, at

every point where the mask is used, contrives to express through it what nothing else could express so wholly. In a play where the nerves of the *dramatis personæ* are very much awry the designer may distort the room and the furniture and even the clothes to accord with the character's state. But this invention in itself is soon exhausted, nothing in fact could be more easily hit upon than such a device and nothing could sooner lose its edge. Such a setting, if that is all it comes to, merely succeeds in getting in the dramatist's way. Nothing is more obvious than symbolism when it is poor or perfunctory. Nothing is less expressive than stylization that merely tries to avoid naturalism.

There is no right way in *décor*, neither the stylized nor the realistic; in every case the end is the same, which is to create something that justifies itself by expressing what nothing else could quite express. When this happens in the *décor*, it rises to its high place in the art of the theater. Otherwise, if it is not bad or intrusive, it may be a humble surrounding for the characters and action, a pleasant ambient that we take for granted or scarcely see.

In the theater of to-day there are numberless theories major and minor of design, from a complete elimination of setting to the utmost complexity; we may have a naked stage such as Copeau used, or curtains, or the screens of Gordon Craig, or a permanent architectural background like Norman-Bel Geddes' *Arabesque*, or scenes that try to copy reality to the last degree of illusion or of duplication, as in Mr. Belasco's production of *Lulu Belle*, or scenery that looks like an enlarged painting, brush-strokes and all, as in Roerich's sets for *Schnegourotzka*, or constructionist design, as in the Russian *Lysistrata* or *The Man Who Was Thursday*; for all of which the files of *The Theatre Arts Monthly* afford the best record in English. In the history of theatrical décor there are many phases: the architectural setting of the Greeks: the Elizabethan stage with apron stage, inner scene, painted cloths; the elaborate baroque architecture of the seventeenth and eighteenth century on the Continent; the intimate interior of Molière's day; the scene painters' various but more or less undesigned efforts in the nineteenth century, and so on.

All these varieties of design rest on the same basis and have the same purpose, which is to create a theatrical setting for a theatrical idea. New ideas and qualities demand a new character of design that will express their character. Types of ideas—the general conceptions characteristic of an epoch, for example—demand and evolve their fitting décor. Each of these types of décor illustrates the same movement through many changes until the form natural to the idea is achieved, after which the movement sets in from this form and toward a changed form for a changed content.

As has often been said, the décor depends on one man only where the rest of the production depends on many. This is most evident of course. The dramatist must rely on the actors and director, the actor on the play and the director, and the director on them; but the designer, though his idea may at the start be tampered with by the dramatist or producer, works straight when he does get to work and uses his medium directly. In one respect only must he depend on another medium: for his costumes he depends on the actor's art in wearing them,

which on our stage at least is nearly always nil. Through this one-man fact it is easy to see how we may sooner find nowadays an admirable set at the hands of a designer than an admirable scene at the hands of the playwright, actors and director combined. I have seen few plays and little acting in late years that could be compared with some of Mr. Robert Edmond Jones' designs, and nothing else modern of any kind in the theater that was the equal in imagination to Mr. Norman-Bel Geddes' *Dante Model*. The next generation may see better plays and worse décor, or one country may now excel in one theater element, another in another; as happened in the seventeenth century when France led in the drama of Molière and Racine, and South Europe led in the famous baroque décor. This illustrates how uneven is the progress of the theater art; but it is nothing against it. In any other art the several elements vary from epoch to epoch and artist to artist in excellence. For color Titian carries painting beyond Bellini but does nothing for line; and Spenser carried English poetry far ahead of his forerunners in all but narrative construction.

Settings may strike exactly the same character as the scene they contain, as in Mr. Lee Simonson's designs for *Les Ratés*, the play by Lenormand, in eleven episodes, produced by the Theatre Guild. These eleven settings were changed in less than a minute, developed from a few lines, objects and motives, just as the written scenes were, and like them expressionistic in method and direct and vivid in tone, and of the same degree of imagination and technical craft.

Or the décor provided by the designer may push the play aside; he may tend to dwarf, distort or estrange the scene by the setting he provides, as Mr. Norman-Bel Geddes did with *Arabesque*. In *Arabesque* there was a scene in which the citizens of the Arabian town came in pursuit of the lover who had shamed a maiden by looking on her face unveiled. Down the steps into the court and up again and over housetops the figures streamed, covered in darkness, each with his pierced lantern whose light ran here and there over the walls and ground. Of this scene with its searching fingers of light and shadow, its flying shapes, its

nuances of color, space and motion, we can say that here was a case where words could have done nothing compared to what this device achieved, that it was visual expression carried to a complete and astonishing degree of expression. In this case the particular play in hand was wrecked, the ruling idea of the occasion lay in the visual part of it. What was needed to balance matters was a play from the same hand as the design.

This in fact is precisely what Mr. Geddes has planned in his *Dante Model*, which he has designed for the production of a version that he would make of *The Divine Comedy*. It is certain that few instances of dramas or acting have created art of such significance as this design. And since it is a supreme instance of what visual expression may do in the theater art, and is available for study in the Theatre Arts edition, we may dwell on it for a moment.

The *Dante Model* calls for a circular stage, 135 feet in width and 165 feet on its longitudinal axis, and composed entirely of steps. From a central pit the slope rises on the far side to fifty feet; on the near side the slope

ends in a ledge, one-fourth as high, which descends toward the audience in a series of terraces until it reaches the level of the pit bottom; and there a valley runs half-way round the circle, separated from the audience by a wall seven feet high. People may pass inside this wall or on top of it. The wall ends on either side in a sort of tower which rises from the slope in a series of steps. Further back another pair of towers or plinths rise to a height of seventy-five feet. The audience sits, as it did in a Greek theater, in a half circle before this scene.

Mr. Geddes' arrangement of *The Divine Comedy* would not embody to any great extent that side of Dante that poets love. Nor should we have, in the drama that Mr. Geddes proposes, that terrible and penetrating immediacy that Dante has, nor that physical and spiritual precision, carried to the last and closest poetry of the soul. That might be drama too, but it is more intimate and within. What Mr. Geddes takes is that part of Dante's poem that moves toward a great essential form. What this drama of Mr. Geddes would take out of Dante

is the soaring pattern of the idea. The action as he plans it would begin in long straight lines, slowly. The tempo increases, the lines are bent. The speed cannot longer be followed, the action spins round and round. There emerges the design of the soul's search and the soul's wonder and revelation. A kind of cosmic outline is discovered for the whole. Something is here revealed in motion that is like the motion of worlds, of the earth where men's lives are led, and that relates the poem to the universal. To this scope and dilation the uses of music would be brought, and light, words and variable forms, all the sides of us, all the channels by which we respond to the universe about us.

Looking at the series of photographs in the book, I could not believe that all of them, so inexhaustibly diverse, could derive from that single mass that the model is, if it were not for the earth again, whose forms, I know, have by the miracle of light the same endless variety and life. In one of the photographs—almost, I think, the most beautiful of them all—the front wall of the place is shadowed, and the forms standing on the ledge of it are black against

the sea of light that lies in the pit. Beyond and running to the base of the plinths, are the long lines of the steps; beyond them is shadow again where the upper part of the slope might be. The plinths stand in a half darkness, they are like cliffs before which the steps of a temple extend. And on the steps to one side, not far from the base of the plinth, are two figures with the light upon them. A picture this is that spreads into a grave, classical peace and at the same time a rapture, into a kind of quiet order and ecstasy, that I have not seen before. Or take the scene in fainter tones, everything in it soft and drowned in a gentle world of light. The figures stand below to the front, they extend to the top of the slope, they crowd the edges of the plinths and towers, of which the forms have softened and lost their angular details. The rear plinths seem now to be two great ships of stone come strangely into a marble harbor. And upon them cluster winged figures, as if all this were some radiant embarkation into immortal space.

And finally take that scene in which the valleys and ledges and towers have vanished and

we have a sweep of silver stairs with vast shadows of wings enclosing them on either side; and in the center beyond and high up, a radiance, with two forms dimly seen in it—

O abbondante grazia, ond'io presuni
 ficcar lo viso per la luce eterna
 tanto che la veduta vi concuni!

O abundant grace, wherein I presumed to fix my gaze on the eternal light so long that my sight was there consumed!

No one who considers the theater and its nature, could fail to wonder what effect the décor has on the actors in a play, how much the mood that the designer creates may color, intensify, cramp, exalt, overshadow or project the actor's state of mind and his effect on the audience. We may take the work of Mr. Robert Edmond Jones as seen in the theater or as recorded by the book published also by the Theatre Arts Company. No one could fail to wonder, looking at these designs and costumes of Mr. Robert Edmond Jones, what effect such an investiture of genius could have on the actors in the play. These actors are the

immediate protagonists at hand in the drama out of life that the dramatist has given them to present. But in the vaster theater within which the actors, the designer and the dramatist together move, the protagonists are the souls of the actors, the soul of the dramatist and the designer's soul. Within these settings that the designer provides, the business of the costumes is to reveal and ennoble the actor's part, as his business is to fill them; together mutually they define and illuminate each other. And if the actor is poorer and the dramatist poorer than is good for the designer, it is his business not to design down to them, as it were, but to express what may have been, even beyond the dramatist's own conscious purpose or the actor's capacity, the nobler and living origins from which, however far off they may be, their impulse and idea have sprung.

This is the lift and fecundity, these are the conceptions at work, that we have seen in Mr. Jones' productions, in the magnificent *Birthday of the Infanta*, in *Hamlet* and elsewhere. We may take his Banquet Scene in *Macbeth*. That scene—with its fierce, ghastly colors, its

light and dark, its figures of the king and queen and banqueters—not merely bold and obvious like so many designs of its type, among the Germans especially—is, for covered and insuppressible passion, quite unequaled among stage drawings, so far as I know them; it has in it the memory of some horror when the worshipers peered into the reeking viscera of some primitive sacrifice, it is full of voices within us as old as the race, and yet it is held to the ideal mood of great drama.

To a soul, Plotinus says, in one of those passages of his that shine on the center of our thought, is allotted its own fortunes, not at haphazard but always under a Reason, as the actors of our stage get their masks and other costumes. With the designer for the theater it is the same. As this soul's fortunes are to it, to the designer is allotted his fortune, the drama that he is to clothe, what background of the visible world it shall be given, what garments, furniture and light. He, like this soul in Plotinus, and like this actor, adapts himself to the fortunes assigned to him, ranges himself rightly to the drama that he must invest, and to the whole

principle of the piece. He too must speak out what business is given to him, exhibiting at the same time all that a soul can express of its own quality, as a singer in a song. But like this soul and like this actor, the designer holds a peculiar dignity. All three of them act in a vaster place than any stage, and have it in themselves "to be masters of all this world."

The designs of a fine artist in the décor of the theater assume the fortunes that the dramatist has allotted to him, and express them, carrying radiantly the necessary essence of the idea. They further and reveal the meaning of the characters and the event, and convey the shock of their vitality; they sing the drama's song. But they sing the singer, too. He himself creates within the part assigned him.

Soul and Body

WHATEVER idea is expressed must have a style to express it, and what does not express the idea is not its style. The idea determines the style as the hidden power of crystallization works in a mineral. Nor can the same thing be said in two different ways; each way says a different thing. This is what Buffon meant when he said that style is the man; what Spenser meant when he said that soul is form and doth the body make, and what Chaucer meant when he said the word must be cousin to the deed. In art the medium—words in literature for example—is the fund from which style borrows the substance to contain it; out of the medium arises the body, style is the soul that animates this body.

On this basis we cannot say, as we often hear it said, that a play has a good style but no content, or that some artist or other has a good technique but nothing to say. In a way, however, we can say it; there may be such a thing

as a good technique with nothing behind it. In social life certain movements and gestures, certain bows, have been developed that express certain meanings, and that can go on being used without having much content to them, they have taken on a kind of separate life of their own. In acting, likewise, there are forms, tones, gestures, phrases and characters that develop and are more or less expressive apart from much idea or sincerity behind them. When these are used we may get the vehicle itself with some aspect of vitality in it; and in fact some degree or idea or sincerity will nearly always be there, either by the artist's imitation of others, or by the excitement that the mere style itself will work on him. But even with nothing meant by it or felt within it, style might be present. It may be a sort of golden mask left by what was once alive and once expressed by it; it may be as husks, dead garments for once living fruit; or—like the corpse of the Cid on horseback that spread terror among the Moors—it may carry some of the force of its past. Style may be a sort of engine that once was vital, something that we had best call not technique nor style,

but mechanics, certain effects that after a fashion go on working when the life has gone out of them.

Most people nowadays, talking of the theater, have two ways of speaking of style; they either speak of it in the way painters use the word when they say that Fragonard has style, Il Greco has style, as a sort of personal extra distinction or luster; or they mean by style the manner in which anything is expressed. Style in this second sense the public judges on the basis of the natural, and thinks a work of art done well in so far as it resembles life.

In the century of our grandfathers, along with that pretense of literal truth that led to a lying so odd and so antagonizing to this generation, went a mania for the natural in art. Formal gardens broke up into pretty chaos. Romantic accident in art revealed men's souls. Painting went in for artlessness and narrative likeness. Poetry was supposed to shun artifice, to be artless, the child of mystery and an innocent God. These latter years of ours, in poetry and painting both, have brought forth schools and movements that have done much to break

down such limitations in the theory of these arts. There are miles of modern paintings that, however little they resemble anything in the world, do at least stress the art's right to as much as it likes of freedom from fact. And there are volumes of poems that declare, and shout indeed, their technical artifice, and make artfulness, a demonic heavenly craft of words, their souls' release. But the art of the theater has gone more slowly. On the Continent there have been schools and movements, expressionism and others, but in America certainly less. Our main body of theater is natural. It is based on resemblance, reproduction, photography. Realism reigns, and confusion with regard to its theory confuses our notions with regard to the theater's style.

Realism, like every form and every style in art and in nature, arises because it is expressive of something that is to be expressed. As distinguished from the poetic method, the realistic may be thought of as a method in which outer details, and only outer details, that we can actually see with our eyes and hear with our ears, are employed to express what the artist wishes to express; where in the poetic method

anything is allowed to the artist, whether or not it is possible or ever seen or heard, so long as it expresses what is desired. To say that realism shows us life as it is, became long ago such nonsense as only a simple soul indeed would swallow, since at the very outset there is no is-ness to life. Realism, as much as any other method in art, selects, arranges, breathes into its material the idea that will preserve it from universal welter and chaos. There is a kind of realism to be found always that seems natural because its selection from nature and its method of treatment have long been familiar to us. There is another kind of realism, always appearing, that seems unnatural because it selects another aspect of nature, not so familiar to us in art. The hair, for example, in a statue of Michelangelo's is apt to seem more natural than in Epstein's statues, but only because we are more used to the particular style employed in the Renaissance, whose classic past has been longer with us than our own hair.

The realistic method turns on external possibility in its details; there is no other basis on which to distinguish it. For it is clear that Bernard Shaw, who uses a method of details

taken from our daily and actual surface of life, is in content fantastic, fervid and poetical. Or better, take Chekhov's *Cherry Orchard*. What soul and tremor of life arises there is no more life as it is than Shakespeare exhibits, but an impalpable inner poetry or idea, exactly as freshness wakes in us from the rain, verdure from trees, and enchantment from the night. But every one would say that the works of Shaw and Chekhov are realistic in method, not poetic; though the line between any two methods is never fixed, and there is no right and wrong outside the work of art itself. About soliloquy in drama, for instance, we are told in text books that it is out of date and that in good technique it should be avoided save where it would be natural for a man to speak so to himself. It would be more pertinent and illuminative to say that save in those cases where it is quite natural, soliloquy is a sort of artifice or arrangement, a departure from the realistic, and then to say that the degree of departure of the work of art from the realistic will determine the amount of soliloquy possible. It is a question of the degree of ideality desired in the artist's repre-

sentation of life; which is to say that it is a question of essential unity of style.

The point is not that one method is better than another, but that each serves to express what it alone can express—as a tree carries its own principle and a cloud its own, as music embodies its own soul and architecture its own—and so one method differs from another, as there is one glory of the moon and another glory of the stars. The point is that realism, even great realism, is not the only way of life in the theater.

On one hand we have realism, basing its truth on the actual surfaces of living, seeming to assume that it gives us things as they are. On the other hand is democracy, in which all are born equal, in which, as Plato says, the pupil is as good as the master, the ass as good as the rider, and everything is ready to burst with liberty. Every one, then, being naturally familiar with things as they are and being born equal to any one else, is a born judge of the theater; Everyman is a full-blown critic. Nothing, so far as this Everyman can tell, is needed but for him to estimate how much this

art that he observes is similar to life, not to life abundant, everlasting, and mysterious, but to the daily surface displayed to his eyes and ears. Exactly as democracy has flattered him, the politician and the wheedling press, telling the merest imbecile that he has a right to judge his government's imperialistic problem, that he even knows what he wants, so too has the realistic theory flattered him. He can tell you whether the work of the theatrical art is true or not, by comparing it with life. But the fallacy here is most obvious; we cannot assume that he can either see or hear; for the average man sees very little exactly and hears no more than he sees. To know anything quite is indeed the last thing that he will ever do, for science is farther from him than poetry.

When this man goes to the theater, however, what is asked of him is that he bring along his eyes and ears, and nothing said about their quality. He can look from the actor to the men he has seen: truly each has two legs, he can see that. Men on the stage walk, leap, sneeze, quite as he has observed in life. No expertness of sense is asked of him; no fine hear-

ing or sight; no culture in words with all their splendor and rarity, their power, lust, vanity, and persuasion; no tradition; no training in taste. There is no element present to put him in his place; every one is equal. He has no ruling or dominating social idea to which he will subject the living material on the stage before him, and by which he measures it; nor on the other hand, is there in him any audacious chaos that this art must capture or arouse, terrible like the rush of the blind, ineluctable life. He is not to be obstructed with the difficult languages of style. He is not to be blocked with intellectual distinction or intimidated by cerebral rigors. He is to be made easy in the intense biological inane and very much at home in the æsthetic Zion. He has picked up a yardstick to measure things by, and it happens to be realistic. This yardstick is not his own, either; it has been given him quite as much as any other might. A theory has been put into his hands, and by it his idea of art is narrowed, his appreciation of art made dull and rambling, his response to new art forms impeded and his

weak conclusions endorsed with a kind of critical approval.

We cannot say that realism is all the public will accept. When we come to the popular delights of the theater—melodrama and vaudeville—matters are better off. In these forms of the art of the theater, there is stylization, violent projection, concentration, arbitrary and unphotographic method, whatever, in sum, can get the effect sought after. From these, one of our audiences gets its pleasure without remonstrance over any violation of fact or probability of likeness; it takes them as pure theater and gets from them an inner thing, an emerging life and emotion, more or less regardless of the form that expresses it. They take it freely the way it comes. It is only when they want to be critical or theoretical that they cast about for a theory and find the one readiest and easiest to be in the realistic.

Such a theory put to such uses limits their conceptions, distorts their approach, justifies their dullness or self-complacency, and defends their obtuseness. It succors them when they are unable to bother with a play of Sophocles'; for

on the strength of it they can say that Sophocles is all artificiality and unnatural formalism. When they are blind to the power of a great visual design in stage movement or individual gesture, they can call it unnatural. It enables them to say with utter nonsense that they like Mr. Walter Hampden's *Hamlet*—which may be good or bad but not for such a reason—because they would not know that it was verse, so natural is it. On this realistic basis, they are freed of operatic obligations; they can dismiss what they are deaf and blind to in opera because nobody would sing like that when he was fighting a duel. It excuses them when they like best the actors that they can feel easy with, that are just folks, that are not so much world artists as Woodmen of the World, democratic Rotarians. It lets them out of seeing the point in Mr. John Howard Lawson's *Processional*, because it is all just artificial tricks, and Benavente's *Bonds of Interest* because it is only stagey.

Every epoch has its platitude. In the Elizabethan there was the poetic platitude of borrowed finery, inflated images and tinsel gush

of words; in the Restoration, imitative chic, skimmed elegance, parade of the naughty town; in Ibsenian realms, the moral Jeremiads and intense, parochial personal ethics. With our theater just now, the platitude comes out as the play of common life. There is no harm in these little pieces themselves. What they give us is usually a bit of popular life—a young married couple and their vicissitudes with prosperity, parents, and simple conjugality; or we get a kindly slice of small town life, offensive to none, with New York and success in the offing, well bolstered with a true girl's love. In these dramas, the character drawing is fair up to a certain point, mostly safe formulas of character; the incidents are friendly and recognizable. A few popular truths are reconcluded, pungent comment is eluded, the social philosophy is that of newspapers, the details are taken from the mere daily journalism of our existences. Now and then one of these plays of common life scores an achievement, hits something. But in general the absence from them of all such qualities as close and revealing style, declamation, formal arrangement, rigor and austerity of idea

or brilliance of mood, can but lead to disastrous ends. It means that the dramatist will be less and less able to speak except of that common or simple, or at least audible and visible, side of life that this method can express. It means that actors use only that side of their art that renders—faithfully, intensely or casually, according to the actor's talent—what we can see and hear in life and the feelings that such experience can arouse. And it means that audiences exercise in the theater these same responses, and are engaged with recognitions, convincing verisimilitudes, duplications, and such emotions as these recognized verities can express.

We must remember that the theater is not confined to such details and such recognizable material, but has also in it elements that have the property of music to convey pure idea, to put into us what no words can express; the ideality of architecture is an element in the theater too; and every fertility or freedom of line, rhythm, form, and arrangement is possible to this theatrical art. The richness, the variety, of the theatrical medium ends only with the complete resource of life. It is free as life is,

its forms are free of all but their own expressiveness. Great realism is a fine thing in the theater, but in so far as the realistic theory and practice lead us to forget this freedom, the realistic theory and practice must be considered, must be put in their place, be well aired, seen in their due scale, and set aside when they are unsuited to what is to be expressed.

It is no more possible to say, as many laymen and some critics did, that Duse in *Così Sia* was not good because she did not resemble an old peasant woman in either appearance or gesture, than it is possible to say of a madonna of Rossellino's that she is not good because she does not look either Jewish or like a carpenter's wife. In such a case, what is expressed is said in terms of the human body, voice, action, gesture, presence. These are the means by which the expression is achieved, but they are not what is expressed. Duse can give you the peasant woman feature for feature, making the soul of her arise out of the peasant woman's literal self, and you on your part may delight in the precision of her resemblance and get little else, or you may respond to the soul that

she has created into these exact details that she reproduces out of life. She can give you the woman as remote as a figure in an early fresco, filling in the abstract form with only ecstasy and eternal dream; and you may receive the ecstasy and dream of it, free of restricting recognitions, or you may so resent the remoteness that the idea is lost. It is at the artist's own peril and through his own necessity that he chooses his relation to the external detail.

To miss what Duse at such a time has to say may be for lack of the ability to understand the technical language that she speaks—the visual line, the tone, the rhythm that the art of a thing consists of—that is the misfortune of ignorance on your part or of a poor natural endowment. But to have a theory that supports you in such obtuseness is a calamity.

Take the Casket Scene from *The Merchant of Venice*, that drama of Shakespeare's that so constantly attracts actors, and that suffers so much from the weight of their egotisms and lack of cultural scope. This scene is, as any one ought to see, to vary Shelley's line, only a pageantry of lovely ghosts on a Venetian

stream. The father's will, his daughter's oath to marry according to the casket's choice, the love Portia feels for Bassanio and his love for her, coming with bright retinue to Belmont to try his fortunes for her hand and her estates—all this, together with the verse, the rich words, the embroidered figures and poetic images, is of one texture. We might fall on painting here for a help, remembering, perhaps, Simonides' half-true and once famed remark: "Painting is dumb poetry and poetry speaking painting." We can study Shakespeare's art here in the light of Veronese's. It has the quality of Veronese, a golden masquerade of life, an arrangement, in the nuances of which appear the sting and beauty that will delight us and increase our living.

The easiest part of such a scene to contemplate realistically is the story; for actions are, of course, easily seen as actual. All the productions I ever saw tried therefore to make this story real. They always try to give to the incidents that happen with the love, the caskets, the suitors coming and going, a certain plausibility. But to work so is to be misled by a false

reality. It is to throw the scene out by letting into one of its elements an illusion of realistic probability. The event, the action, is as much the artist's material as anything else. He may use it as realistically or as remotely, as photographically or as abstractly, as he likes. The artist has as much right to arrange and design a piece of incident to go with his rhythmic ideas, to carry his verse melody, to accompany his scenery, as he has to arrange or design music or scenery to accompany his incident. He may make a stylization, an arrangement of his incidents quite as much as of his words, scene, or music. The event can have the same removal and the same quality as the writing; the events of the Trial Scene, for instance, must find their key, exactly as the Quality of Mercy speech is not the high-horse affair that most actresses, buried in red robes and egotism, make of it; it is more happily seen not as a sermon but as an aria. No one of the elements that compose the Casket Scene is more real than the other; they are all external material through which the dramatist expresses his own idea, the action as much so as any. The scene, events and all, is

a work of art complete in itself, with its own essential characteristic, and free of everything outside itself; as free as Veronese's *Marriage at Cana* is of history or fact or anything but its own power and intention, by which it stands or falls.

The essence of life is that it is unceasing, everchanging, as contrasted with what is fixed and dead, and there are as many forms in art as there are aspects of life to be expressed. The essence of style in art is that no form can be quite predicted before it comes into being, and that there is no form that is right when separated from the one content that it alone expresses, and none better or worse save with regard to the soul that is to be expressed. It does not follow that this idea will find its own style; for between it and its style lies the knack for expression. Shakespeare would doubtless never have had a style in music nor Beethoven in words. Through this knack style arrives, through the lack of it a style fails to appear. In the creations of one artist or of several, and slowly and through many changes, a style is reached that entirely expresses the idea, the

style appears that is natural to it. The term *natural* means only that. And in an art the word *natural* makes sense only when it implies no binding obligation to anything outside a work of art's soul, its idea, its intentions. The work of art is not natural with regard to something else but with regard to its own nature. It approaches complete naturalness as it is free of all characteristics not its own. In this freedom the unity of its nature consists, and in this unity consists its beauty, which is what St. Augustine meant in his description of beauty—*Omne quippe pulchritudinis forma unitas est*.

A work of art can be unnatural from two causes only: It may not be true to its own nature—a realistic gesture, for instance in *Œdipus King* or a formal gesture in *The Cherry Orchard*—and so does not share the quality of the idea. Or it may fail to create enough to be natural to, no nature is established. In the Copeau-Croué version of *The Brothers Karamazov*, for example, we have titanic human beings or at least human elements, insanity, love, madness and so on, in the father and the sons, and terrible events ensuing; but all these

may be regarded as unnatural because of the fact that in the play no life tremendous enough is created in which they could share and out of which they might arise.

We may take the acting of Madame Cécile Sorel of the Comedie Française. She knows stage manners, how to wear gowns that are remarkable creations; she has diction, voice control and a glorious and shameless exhibitionism, all valuable things in the theater, all only with long labor acquired. People are justified in calling this art unnatural, not because it is formal, polished, sophisticated, traditional, but because it is empty. Nothing gets through that perfect enameled skin; the heart within that handsome bosom beats with the pulse of the Rue de la Paix. The burden of this divinely callous craft is only the burden of the chic. There is a hard perfection; the undismayed, decorous feet; the glisten of the scenes, nothing else; nothing is there by way of content in feeling or experience to which her technical exhibition is related.

When Horace made his observation on Ennius' poetry, he may or may not have been

right about Ennius, but he was saying something very pertinent concerning style; though Horace himself doubtless would have meant quite another thing by such a term. In his own poetry, he said, if the verses were transposed, the poetic element would disappear. But if a passage from Ennius were cut up thus we should find poetry in it still—*Invenies etiam disjecti membra poetæ*.

Ideally the style in a work of art spreads throughout the whole of it; its characteristic appears in every particle. It is like a flower when you cut it through, the character, wherever you cut it, remains beautiful and alive.

To the Audience

A MAN'S style is the soul that animates the body of his living. From the fund of his experience his style borrows substance to contain it. This sum of himself, his style, with all its flight, stability and wonder, is what he brings to any work of art when he responds to it and proves what meaning it shall have for him. But this work of art meanwhile has in turn its own animating soul; and unless he senses the peculiar nature of that, his response is pointless.

The theater, like every art and like every organism that is alive, is jealous of its own nature; what belongs to it in its theatricality it takes in, absorbs, makes a part of itself; what is not its matter it expels and defeats. At our own cost we confuse the theater with reality; for despite the confusion of theory over its representation of men and actions, the theatrical remains an art, as architecture does, and is never anything else. It defeats too any purpose

we may have of forcing it to uses not in its own nature, making it only a thesis argument, for example, or a social corrective, or a preaching vehicle, or a messenger service for personal opinion, or a museum of facts. Such matters as these it will either cast off in due time or else transmute into its own luster and pressure, as it follows its bright and singular existence.

The theater's materials are events, characters, emotions, actions, colors, textures, words, movements, sounds. Just as the sound *O* gives us a different excitement from the sound *I*, or the circle from an oval, or marble from silk, so the materials of the theater have expressive values in themselves. These materials are the substances that make up the theater art. We need to respond to these various substances in the theater, for they are the elements in it that lead us back to feeling; by which—let us not forget—we were first led to contemplate the world, and by which still—and not of itself—the world is dear and significant to us.

In the theater, then, as in any art, we must respond to its materials in themselves. But we

must also learn to discern when it is the substance that is beautiful and when the form, and when both; otherwise it would be like knowing the texture, warmth, odor, hardness and color of a body without knowing the form that the soul of it determines. In art it is the form that expresses the idea. In no art is it more difficult or more necessary than in the theater to perceive what is the artist's material and what his idea, to distinguish between substance and form. We advance toward such a perception through an understanding of the language of the theater art, which is the subject-matter of such a book as this; and we arrive through a cultivation in ideas, in conceptions, which are the subject-matter of all our living.

Around us in the world we see forms, shapes, into which characteristic forces of nature seem to have found embodiment. A tree, a horse, a flower, any one of these fades or disappears, it goes back to dust; but the form returns in others of its kind and is the idea of it that remains with us, which is what Meleager meant in his poem, 'Ὁ στέφανος περὶ κρατὶ—

TO THE AUDIENCE

The garland fades on Heliodora's brow,
But she shines out, garland of the garland.

We see these forms in nature, and in ourselves likewise we desire forms, patterns of our mental world that we call conceptions, within which our inner stream of life finds shapes that will contain it. We would have ideas as new bodies into which the souls of our experiences have been reborn. We would have ideals, which are projections, through feeling, of our intellectual preferences to the completeness that we desire. It is these ideas and complete instances brought to the service of the theater, that complete its function, which is to exalt, amuse, clarify and enrich our lives, to hold up to us the splendor and measure of time and memory against which our lives, in their greatness, meanness, proportion and absurdity, are led.

And finally it is by such a culture that we cure ourselves of a common fallacy in discussions of the theater, I mean the belief that the excellence of a work of art is measured by the

THE THEATER

number of people in the audience who understand it, an obvious absurdity, since a feeding whistle is unanimously understood by a whole yard of pigs. No doubt the greatest art has something that can be understood by many. But it is better to say that the test of a theatrical work of art is not so much that every one understands it, as that to them who do its meaning is lofty and significant.

THE END

